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by HELEN AHERN

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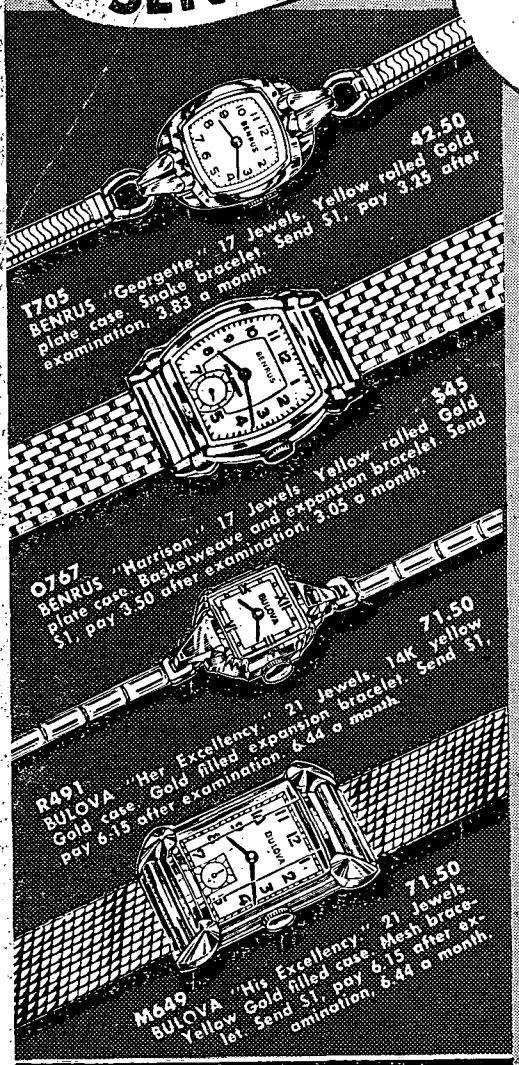

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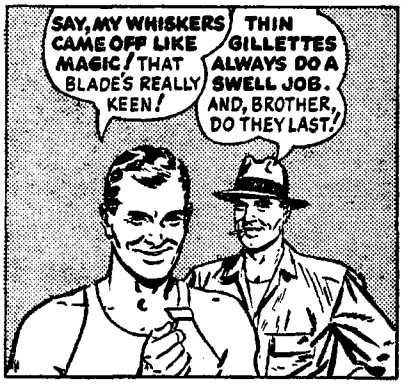

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Next Issue Published November 19th

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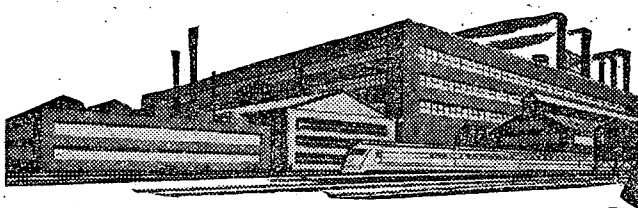

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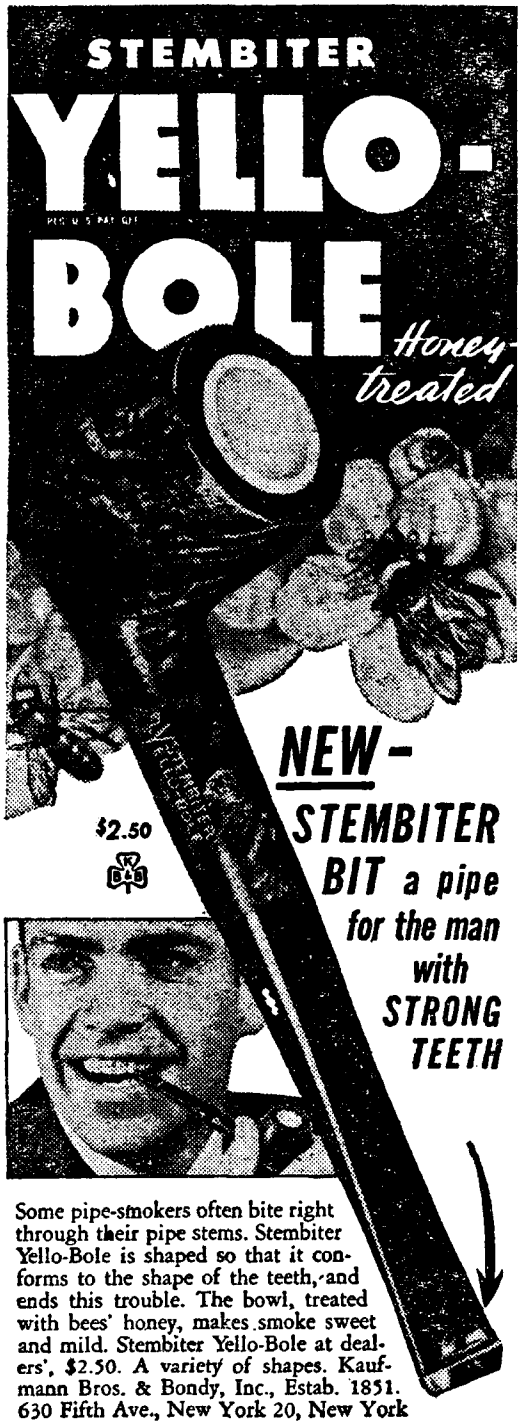
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7531 WANTS PALS ANYWHERE

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Bob

7532 EX-WAC

I am five feet four, have dishwater blonde hair and brown eyes, am twenty-seven, single and have a pretty good disposition. Like baseball, bowling, sentimental poetry, and some sports. Would like to write to others in same predicament.

Mitzie

7533 LONELY BACHELOR

Forty-seven years old, five feet four with brown eyes and hair describes this lonely bachelor. Live way out in the country with no shows to see and few neighbors.

Henry

(Please turn to page 8)

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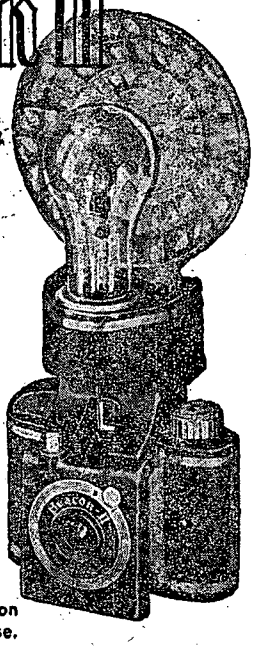

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(Continued from page 6)

7534 FILIPINO

I am a Filipino, twenty-four and live in Cebu City. Am studying in San Carlos University and hope to be an accountant. Am five feet two, have black hair and eyes. Like reading, movies, sports, people. Would like pals my age.

Sue (5c postage)

7535 FROM ITALY

An Italian boy, twenty-two, living in Italy, five feet nine, brown hair and eyes would like to hear from girls between sixteen and twenty. Am a student. Like dancing, reading, tennis. Will send snapshots.

Alfredo (5c postage)

7536 FROM GERMANY

As a German student I'd like to correspond with people in the United States who share my interests, collecting stamps and modern music. I live in the British zone of Germany and will be happy to tell you how things are here and to learn about America.

Dietrich (5c postage)

7537 NEW YORKER

I am a five feet five Spanish girl who now resides in New York. Have black hair and big dark eyes. My favorite pastimes are reading and movies. If you would like to hear about the beautiful tropical island where I come from, just write me.

Tropical Senorita

7538 FARM BOY

Here's a lonely young man who likes to read, listen to good music, write letters and make friends. Am twenty-six, have blue eyes, brown hair and am in good health. Would like to hear from any young lady from twenty to twenty-five.

Bob

7539 LIKES COWBOYS

A sixteen year old girl, five foot three, blue eyes and brown hair likes cowboys and everything about the West. I'll write to boys from seventeen to nineteen from the West, especially Colorado. I live on a farm. Like to sing, yodel and love the woods.

Big Eyes

7540 GIRLS PREFERRED

Won't some of you fine girls write to a nice bachelor? Am sure I can appreciate good friends, girls twenty-five to thirty-five preferred. I live in the country in the mid-West. Like movies, music. Am five feet eleven and have brown hair and blue eyes.

Larry

(Please turn to page 98)

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Love

"I'd forgotten that you were so very beautiful," he said uncertainly.

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In Trouble

By
Helen Ahern

How can a man deny the love of a girl who was the only one to believe him innocent of murder?

IT WAS THE most pleasant time of the year in Tidewater Virginia. December and the hunting season. It was the most pleasant time of the day at Clayton's Gun Club. The hour before dinner with the hunters home from the blinds and the aroma of roast duck drifting from the big kitchen of the lodge.

Andrea Clayton and her father were relaxed before a glowing log fire in their private sitting room. She had dressed with more than usual care for dinner in a whirl skirt of black wool and white evening sweater embroidered in gold sequins. The firelight picked out blue gleams in her satin-black hair. Her eyes were very blue between sooty lashes.

Her father looked at her with approval tinged by amusement. He was a long lanky man with a face weathered by many suns and winds. Jim Clayton had a nation-wide reputation among sportsmen as being one

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of the best guides and hosts on the Atlantic Coast. His manner of speech was dry and pointed.

"All spruced up, I see." He gave Andrea a teasing grin. "Hope young Tyler gets here in time for dinner."

She bent toward the fire so that the dark bell of her hair swung and partially hid the color which crept into the ivory of her face. It embarrassed her to have dressed up for Gregg Tyler. She had not seen him since she was fifteen, four years ago, when, in the uniform of a Navy officer, he had paid a two day visit to her father. Before that she had known him only as a gawky youngster.

Her father went on, "Gregg used to be a great one for a duck dinner, although he never cared much about shooting the birds. Funny, when his old man is so crazy about hunting."

"Frank Baird is not Gregg's father," said Andrea. "He's his step-father."

"And Gregg never cottoned to him much. Probably wouldn't like anything he liked."

ANDREA HAD never "cottoned" much to Frank Baird herself, although she called him Uncle Frank. As long as she could remember, he had been a guest at Clayton's for all, or part, of the hunting season, and he had, at one time, lent her father money. The secret dislike that she felt for him puzzled her. She must have caught it from Gregg.

Her father rolled a cigarette. It had been many years since finances compelled him to roll his own, but he had acquired the habit. There was a tap on the door, and he spilled a little tobacco.

"Come in," he said without enthusiasm. Jim Clayton did not like guests to interrupt his hour of rest but, as the door opened, he found a cordial voice. "Evenin', Frank."

The caller was Gregg Tyler's step-father, Frank Baird.

He was a big man with bulking shoulders, a square-jawed face and small pale eyes. He had changed from hunting clothes to a brown tweed suit and wool sports shirt that he wore open at the throat to reveal a bull-like neck. He carried a bottle of bourbon and a pitcher of ice that he set down on a table with a flourish.

"Imported stuff, Jim," he said. "Thought we might have a drink before dinner."

"It's an idea. I'll get glasses."

Andrea's father crossed to a cabinet in the corner. Frank Baird beamed at her.

"Wish I were younger, as young as Gregg," he said. "And that reminds me, he just phoned. He's across the Cape Charles ferry and will be here within an hour."

"How nice," Andrea murmured, inadequately.

Her father returned to the fire with glasses and a bottle of soda and mixed three drinks. "Glad the boy could make it this year," he said. "It's been a long time."

"Haven't seen much of him myself since he got out of the Navy." Frank took a long swallow of his highball. "I practically insisted that he spend a couple of weeks down here with me. Good place to talk things over. Time he was settling down."

"Thought he was settled down," Jim Clayton said mildly. "Didn't you tell me last year that he and another G. I. architect had taken an office in Philadelphia and were building houses for veterans?"

"Nothing but chicken feed in that kind of stuff." Frank was contemptuous. "Gregg's place is with the Baird interests, and I've got just the spot picked out for him. An airplane parts company in Chicago. I'm taking it over and kicking out the president, a guy by the name of Bronson, and putting Gregg in charge. How's that?"

Andrea decided that it was his way of arranging people's lives that she did not

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like about him. "Perhaps," she suggested, "Gregg would prefer to follow his own profession."

"Gregg has no choice." His step-father frowned, displeased. "I have control of the trust fund that his mother left for him, until he's thirty. For the next six years, unless I die, he gets as much or as little money as I choose to give him. And, if he doesn't show some sense, it will be darned little. His fly-by-night architectural firm isn't doing so well, so—"

He spread his blunt-fingered hands in a gesture that infuriated Andrea. "Will Gregg stand for that kind of pressure?" she demanded.

"Surely." Frank smiled at her, his eyes very small and very pale. "He can't marry a girl like Lucille Drew on buttons."

Andrea felt as if she were on a fast-descending elevator. Her father covered her silence.

"So the boy's thinking of getting married," he said. "Who's Lucille Drew?"

"One of the smoothest little debs in the East, blonde, rich. She's got everything," Frank said and smiled again and winked at Andrea.

"Sounds like Gregg's a lucky guy." She smiled back, downed her drink and rose. "I'd better go down and see how Mrs. Ord is coming with dinner. It must be almost time to eat."

It was a relief to escape the room. She had made the discovery that she more than disliked Frank Baird. She hated him—

Andrea started for the kitchen although it was rare that Mrs. Ord, the housekeeper and cook, needed or wanted her help. Andrea's mother had died when she was nine and Mrs. Ord, a widow, had moved in with her daughter, Jessie, ten years old. She had taken efficient charge of the Club, Andrea and Jim Clayton. It had been a good arrangement for all concerned, until recently.

IN THE lower hall, off which opened the game room and the dining room, Andrea was intercepted by a stocky, sandy-haired young man and was reminded that there was friction in the family. He was Jake Daley, one of the two guides who were helping her father this year. She had known him all her life, and Jake was very much in love with her.

"Why all the glamour?" He caught her by the arm and inspected her with a scowl on his usually amiable face.

"What I wear is my business," Andrea told him.

"That's right, I guess," he agreed. "But you're not fooling anybody. You're dressed up to slay Dreamboat Tyler."

Andrea seethed and was trying to jerk free of him when Jessie Ord appeared at the kitchen door. She was a small girl with red-brown hair and snapping brown eyes. She was as much in love with Jake Daley as he was in love with Andrea, and she had a temper.

"Jake!" she called angrily. "Mother asked you half an hour ago to start the pump."

He released Andrea and moved to obey. Andrea sighed. She and Jessie had been close friends until Jake returned from the Army and love had gone its contrary way. It was sad to have Jessie jealous of her and unhappy. Deciding against going to the kitchen, into which Jessie and Jake had disappeared, Andrea paused.

"Looks like feathers might begin to fly around here, and not all of them duck feathers," drawled a voice behind her, making her whirl.

She found Augie Hoag, the Gun Club's other guide, leaning over the bannister of the stairs. How long he had been there and how much he had heard, Andrea had no idea. She gave him a cold stare. She did not like or trust the man although he had proved to be an excellent shot and a good guide.

Augie was a stranger to the Tidewater

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country. He had come down from northern Michigan at the beginning of the season, a week ago, and applied to Jim Clayton for a job. He claimed that the Michigan climate was getting too cold for him; he was not a young man. Jim had hired him. He needed a guide, and Augie had excellent references from notable sportsmen whom he had taken shooting up north. He had lived up to his reputation. There was really nothing wrong with him except—

"Your ears are too big," Andrea said. "And I wish to Heaven, Augie, you'd stop sneaking around."

"Can I help it if my feet hurt and I wear moccasins instead of boots when I'm inside?" he asked.

He laughed shortly and came down the stairs, a thin slightly stooped man with a lined, pallid face. To avoid him, Andrea stepped into the game room where most of the guests had assembled to discuss the day's shooting over a drink while they waited for dinner. The Club was filled to capacity by twenty men, three of whom had brought their wives along. Most of them had been coming to Clayton's for years, and Andrea was welcomed noisily to their midst.

SHE DID not hear Gregg Tyler's car pull into the grounds. He announced himself with a shout from the hall.

"Hi! Where's everybody?"

Andrea stayed herself from running and went out to him carefully.

Gregg stood just inside the outer door, his bags on the floor beside him. He was as tall and good-looking as she had remembered. Fair-haired and gray-eyed. But war or the problems of peace had left planes and shadows on his thin, fine-featured face.

"Andrea!"

He recognized her with a delighted, one-sided grin. He came to her swiftly and took her by the elbows. For an instant, she thought dizzyingly that he was going to lift her right off the floor and kiss her. He was gazing down at her as if he would like to, but suddenly he seemed seized with confusion.

"I'd forgotten," he said uncertainly, "that you were so very beautiful."

His hands dropped, and Andrea came to her own senses. She remembered Lucille Drew, blonde, beautiful and rich. She stepped away from him.

"Gregg, it's wonderful to have you down here again," she said sedately. "I'll call Link to take care of your bags and show you to your room."

Link was the boy who acted as bell hop for the Gun Club. He was already in the hall waiting, but he was halted from coming forward by the booming voice of Frank Baird who was hurrying down the stairs.

"My dear boy, so you got here. Great!"

He held out a hand and it looked as if Gregg might not take it. Gregg said, "Hello, Frank," in a voice that was careless to the point of insolence. He spoke in an entirely different tone and pumped the hand of Andrea's father who had made a leisurely descent.

"Gee, sir," he said boyishly, "it's like coming home to be here. I only wish—"

He looked around at his step-father, and his glance wished Frank somewhere else. Andrea read it with uneasy wonder. Gregg had not wasted any love on Frank but he had never before seemed to hate him.

"Dinner in ten minutes! Gregg Tyler, get your face and hands washed at once."

Mrs. Ord appeared, stout, motherly and smiling. She spoke as she might have nine or ten years ago to the boy Gregg that she had first known.

"Duck, Mamma Ord?" he asked, laughing and kissed her soundly. He also kissed Jessie who had followed her mother from the kitchen.

Andrea puzzled over why he had not

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kissed her. She was both hurt and glad of the omission. She had always been fond of Gregg, and he had grown to be a dangerously attractive young man.

DINNER WAS served at two long tables, with Andrea presiding over one, her father over the other. Gregg sat at her father's table, but her eyes were drawn to him as if to a magnet. She caught herself waiting for his quick smile, his crooked grin. It would be easy to fall in love with him, and that would be madness. He was going to marry another girl.

She went to bed that night with the firm resolve that she would see as little as possible of Gregg during his two weeks at Clayton's. It promised to be not too difficult.

The guides took the hunters out each day at dawn to the blinds and left them there in pairs with sandwiches and thermos bottles of coffee for luncheon. They did not collect them until late afternoon when they were hungry and tired, ready for nothing more exciting than dinner and an early bed.

Andrea heard them leave the next morning. Cold motors whirred, men shouted to each other, retrievers barked. She went down to breakfast a couple of hours later and learned from her father that Gregg had gone with the rest. Augie Hoag and Jake, finished with their charges until sundown, came in for second breakfasts at the kitchen table where the Club household ate when they were alone.

Jake said, "Baird and young Tyler shouldn't be shooting together. They'll have a rotten time. They were beefing at each other before I got out of earshot."

"Step-father and son, isn't it?" Augie Hoag was all ears. "That can be a murderous combination."

Andrea frowned and spoke sharply. "You two shouldn't be gossiping about guests."

"That's right, Miss Andrea." Jessie Ord, coming up with coffee, seconded her ironically. "Hired help must be kept in its place."

Jake Daley glared. "Shut up, Jess!" he ordered.

"Please, Jessie," Andrea said wearily. "I'm only talking sense. And it's not *Miss* Andrea. It's Andrea, just as it has been for years." This attitude of servility on Jessie's part was new and exasperating to the point of anger.

Augie Hoag was looking from one to another of the three of them with interest. Neither Jim Clayton nor Mrs. Ord were in the kitchen at the moment. Jessie would not have created the small scene had they been.

It was the start of a lonely, restless day.

ANDREA MADE it a habit to meet the returning hunters and congratulate or condole with them on the day's shooting. It was a part of her job as unofficial Club hostess.

She saw with approval that Gregg had his quota of ducks. Whether he liked shooting or not, there were few who could rival his performance as a hunter. He had shot more birds than Frank, but he did not appear elated. There were new lines of strain and fatigue in his young face. He made several attempts to get a word alone with Andrea. She pretended, however, not to see and escaped to the upstairs sitting room as soon as she could.

Temporarily, she had it to herself. Her father was busy helping his guests take care of their game. Andrea stirred up the fire and sat down to wait for him. She had made up her mind that she would not answer the door, and she did not move when the knock came. Then Gregg spoke her name.

"Andrea—"

There was an urgency in his voice that brought her to her feet and across the

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room to the door. "Oh, it's you," she said.

"Whom did you expect?" he asked. "The iceman? Is that why you're hiding?"

"I'm not hiding." Andrea tried for dignity. "Dad and I usually spend an hour up here before dinner."

"And he doesn't like to be bothered by his customers." Gregg laughed. "I know, but don't worry, I'm not staying. Before he's through with the gang downstairs, we'll both be gone, I hope."

Her black-lashed, blue eyes questioned him, and he went on, "I feel like a binge—the nice kind, of course. Let's drive up to the Beach, or into Norfolk, and have dinner and go dancing. Will you, Andrea—please?"

"Gregg, I couldn't." She refused hastily. "Dad wouldn't like it, me going off when there are so many guests here to be kept amused."

"Hunting people amuse themselves and go to bed early," Gregg said. "And your father has already blessed the expedition. I asked him it it were okay before I came up here. Don't you want to go places with me?"

"Yes, but—" She hesitated, not wanting to mention the name of Lucille Drew. It was up to him to speak first of the girl that he was going to marry.

"Come on," Gregg urged. "It's just for an evening's fun."

That decided Andrea. She could be careful. If she kept close watch on her heart, one night need not hurt her irrevocably. She said, "Give me thirty minutes to make myself beautiful."

Gregg laughed, the tiredness washing from his face. "Not a minute more than twenty-five. You're beautiful already."

Andrea heard him whistling in the hall on the way to his room. She set about dressing. Something suitable for restaurant dining and dancing. She chose a deep blue velvet that she had bought in Washington a month before. It had a ballet length skirt, long tight sleeves, and low-cut boat neckline. It was belted in gold, and there was a scrap of a gold lamé hat to match. Gold kid platform sandals. She threw her oppossum jacket over her shoulders and went downstairs.

GREGG WAS waiting in the hall, debonair in the black and white of dinner clothes, beneath his heavy overcoat. He tucked her arm in his.

"Gangway," he said to no one in particular. "Here we go!"

They had to pass the game room. The hunters who were looking whistled and waved jovially. Frank Baird came to the door.

"Going on the town, eh?" he said. "You young people! Better not make it too late or you won't feel like hunting tomorrow."

"So what?" Gregg asked. He led Andrea out to his convertible, scowling. "I'll kill that guy someday," he said darkly, "if he doesn't keep his nose out of my business."

"Gregg! Must you get so worked up?" Andrea was reproachful. "We're going on a party, and it's a perfectly grand night."

It was an ideal December night in Virginia, clear and just cold enough to be exhilarating. The sky was a vast constellation of stars. The road from the club wound through a fragrant forest of scrub pines.

They drove up to Virginia Beach where, Andrea remembered, there was dancing that night at the big year-around hotel. They stopped in one of the town's semi-private clubs for Martinis, and Gregg had recovered his good humor by the time they reached the hotel's grill room. The dinner was excellent. Roast turkey with chestnut dressing that foreshadowed Christmas.

"But it can't beat Mrs. Ord's duck," Gregg said.

Andrea smiled. "She should hear that. You're one of her favorites, and she'll

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probably be hurt because we ran out tonight."

"I'm sorry about that." He frowned again. "But after a day in the blinds with Frank, I couldn't face looking at and listening to him through dinner."

"So this date with me is only an escape," she said teasingly. Then she saw that he was bursting to talk, and she asked, "What's so wrong between you and Frank?"

"It's his determination to run my life," Gregg told her what she had already surmised. "It's a mania with him, and he has the whip hand."

"I've heard. Your mother left you some money and he has control of it."

He nodded. "He talked her into it, exaggerated a couple of my school kid scrapes—nothing serious, things that happen to all boys—but she was very ill the last few months before she died. She wasn't thinking clearly." He lapsed into moody silence and she prompted him.

"And you need the money now."

"I must have part of it if I'm to keep my architectural firm going," he said. "But Frank doesn't want me to make a success as an architect. He wants me to run a factory that will supply parts to Baird Aircraft, keep it all in the family. And he's not family. I'm not interested in running a factory for him, especially a factory that he's as good as stealing."

Her blue eyes, warm with interest, encouraged him to go on. "It's a little concern out in Chicago, started by a chap named James Bronson. He expanded during the war, brought in outside capital. He's been having troubles the last two years with shortages, strikes and cancelled contracts. Frank has him on the ropes now, and is prepared to squeeze him out to make a spot for me."

"How do you know all this?" Andrea asked.

Gregg grimaced. "Frank brags about it to show me what a smart business man he is and what he can do for me. He's prepared to close the deal as soon as he's done duck hunting. He brought me down here to talk me into taking the job. I came down to see if I couldn't argue him out of giving me some of my own money for my own firm."

"It's very important to you, isn't it?" She wished he would speak of Lucille Drew and yet was glad that he did not.

He said merely, "I've got a partner, one swell Joe. I can't let him down. I'll get around Frank somehow."

The statement seemed to cheer him, and he stopped talking to listen to the music. The band was playing *Blue Shadows.*

THEY DANCED, moving together easily and effortlessly. She fitted into the curve of his arm and their steps matched. He bent his head to put his cheek against her hair. Her heart gave an involuntary little jerk.

"You smell nice—pines and salt air," he said.

She covered her inner excitement with a laugh. "You make me sound like the gun club on a wet day."

There was no more serious talk. The evening sang by for Andrea. The moon had risen while they were in the hotel and lighted the road home. The Gun Club was dark. One of the Chesapeake retrievers barked once in recognition of their arrival, and then was silent. Gregg stopped the car at the porch steps and reached around her to open the door. He paused, his arm encircling her.

"I can't remember when I've had so much fun," he said. "Andrea—"

His semi-embrace became a real embrace. His mouth took hers firmly and warmly, while his hand cupped the back of her head. She closed her eyes. She tried to think of Lucille Drew but there was no room for thought within her. His lips on hers was a sweet heady drug that left her limp with longing for more.

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They drew apart to look at each other. The very night around them seemed stilled by wonder. Then, out of the stillness came a chuckle. Augie Hoag shambled out of the shadows of the porch. Andrea stared at him in embarrassed exasperation.

"What on earth, Augie—"

"Didn't know you were out here, miss," he said. "Just wandered down to see what the dogs were yapping about at this hour of the night."

"You're a very faithful guide, Augie." Andrea was openly sarcastic. The man was a born snoop. She said, "Good night," to Gregg hastily and stepped from the car.

In spite of late hours, Gregg went out shooting with his step-father the next morning, but he was back by noon. He was grim-faced and angry.

"This holiday with Frank is no go," he announced. "I'm going back to Philadelphia in the morning."

"I wouldn't be hasty, son," Jim Clayton advised mildly. "I know Frank can be unreasonable, but he can be brought around. It just takes patience."

Gregg snorted his disbelief. He declined an invitation to try some pheasant shooting with Jim after luncheon, and Andrea's father went off by himself with dog and gun. She and Gregg had the Gun Club practically to themselves for the afternoon. Using the battered sedan that he had brought down from Michigan, Augie Hoag drove up to the Beach immediately after luncheon to see a dentist and bring back a grocery order. Mrs. Ord and Jessie busied themselves in the kitchen. Jake Daley took a newly purchased dog out for training.

Andrea and Gregg played records on the combination radio and phonograph in the game room. It could have been a pleasant afternoon, but it was not. Gregg was worried and morose.

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"I'm in a rotten spot," he said miserably. "I'm going to lose the business I've been building up for two years. I can't even get married—"

Andrea caught her breath. She crossed over and shut off the phonograph. Finally, she thought, He was going to tell me about Lucille, but Gregg did not go on. He paced the floor and came to a decision.

"I'll stick it out a while longer, try to be more tactful," he said. "And I'll start by driving out to get Frank this afternoon. Want to come along?"

Andrea accepted the invitation, knowing that she was courting heartbreak, but she could not resist the pleading in Gregg's gray eyes. She sensed that he needed a buffer between himself and his step-father. She slipped on a leather jacket over gray flannel slacks and red wool shirt, and they went out to the convertible.

Augie Hoag had just driven into the yard and he and Jake were preparing to round up the rest of the hunters.

GREGG AND Andrea took the narrow dirt road that led to the back fields and the marshes. She stayed in the car while he went down to get Frank. He did not stay long, and he did not return with Frank.

"Andrea, there's been an accident."

Gregg raced across the field and stopped beside the car, his face white and horror-stricken. She became aware that the Chesapeake which Frank had taken with him that morning was barking furiously down in the blind.

"Uncle Frank—" she faltered.

Gregg nodded. "He—he's been shot. Drive back to the house and get your father and have him call the police. I'd better stay here."

"The police?" She stared, her own face whitening. "You mean—"

"Frank's dead," Gregg said. "Killed. Can you drive all right?"

She put the car in motion and turned it around without speaking. She had no recollection of getting back to the Club. Her father was home, fortunately, and he was efficient although shocked. He telephoned the state police, then took the convertible back to where Gregg waited. Mrs. Ord took Andrea upstairs and made her drink a cup of coffee laced with brandy.

"You'll need strength," she said. "This is bad busineess, what with all the hard feeling between Gregg and his step-father."

It was the thought that had been pounding at the back of Andrea's brain. "Surely, they won't try to blame Gregg," she said. "We don't even know that Uncle Frank didn't shoot himself."

Mrs. Ord agreed with a dubious, "No. But Mr. Baird was used to guns, and the police will have to blame somebody."

They heard the wail of a siren in the distance, and she went downstairs to meet the police. Andrea shivered in spite of the coffee and brandy and the fire that burned brightly in the living room fireplace.

FRANK BAIRD had not accidentally shot himself. He had been shot in the back of the head. His own sixteen-gauge shotgun had been the weapon. Someone had borrowed it on some pretext or other and used it upon him. The State Troopers and County Sheriff Bascom agreed upon these conclusions. Sheriff Bascom and Detective Captain Mitchell of the Criminal Bureau of Investigation also agreed that Gregg Tyler was the logical, the only real, suspect.

The sheriff was a bulky, aging man with thinning hair. Captain Mitchell was tall, black-haired and handsome in a hard aggressive fashion. Both, according to Andrea's father, were shrewd investigators. He came up to the sitting room where she waited fearfully her turn to be questioned.

He said, "They've already got Jake Daley to talking, and Augie Hoag, and

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Jessie. Jake's jealous and talked willingly and Jessie followed his lead. Augie Hoag, as I figure it, is a plain malicious busybody. Hears all, sees all, tells all. Between them they've practically convicted Gregg."

"He couldn't have done it," Andrea cried. "You know that."

"What I know, or what you know, in our own minds doesn't matter." Her father spoke soberly. "He could have shot Frank before he came up for lunch. It's impossible to fix the time of death exactly in weather like this. It's hard in any kind of weather, for that matter."

"Are they going to arrest Gregg?" Andrea asked unsteadily.

Her father put a hand on her shoulder. "Probably, but not right away. Captain Mitchell is all for it, but the sheriff is a cautious man. He wants to investigate every possibility, although there seems to be none."

"Couldn't one of the other hunters have fired a wild shot?"

Jim Clayton shook his head. "None of the others are using sixteen-gauge doubles, and Frank was shot at close range. It was deliberate murder."

Andrea shuddered as she saw the picture as the police would. "And no one around here, except Gregg, would have any reason for killing Uncle Frank."

"That's about it." Her father agreed heavily. "None of the guests were more than casual acquaintances of Frank's. Besides them, there's only myself, Jake, Augie, the Ords and you around. Why should any of us kill a customer?"

"Frank must have made a lot of enemies in his time," she said. "Couldn't one of them have followed him down here?"

"It's a possibility that Bascom is smart enough and just enough to consider that."

There was a rap on the door, and Jessie Ord came in, small and big-eyed. She said to Andrea, "The cops—they want to talk to you next."

Andrea thanked her mechanically and stood up. Her father went downstairs with her. They passed Gregg on the way down, going up to his room with a trooper at his heels. Andrea's heart, and her hands, went out to him.

"Gregg dear—" She started to assure him of her sympathy and understanding, her infallible faith. The coldness of his gray eyes stopped her.

"Save it, chum," he said harshly.

Her father's fingers propelled her on to the lower hall, where a uniformed man stood guard at the front door. The police were using the game room for questioning. The guests had been herded into the dining room where they awaited dinner in uneasy silence. There was no joviality about the hunters tonight. Violent death had touched the Club with dark wings, subduing all.

SHERIFF BASCOM motioned Andrea to a chair and sat down in one facing her. Captain Mitchell remained standing, towering over them both. With a feeling of being surrounded, she looked at her father who had gone to lean on the radio cabinet.

He said easily, "Just answer their questions, honey. You have nothing to be afraid of."

"That's the stuff, Jim." The sheriff nodded approval. He and Jim Clayton were old friends. He said to Andrea, "I'm sorry about this. It must have been hard on you, being with young Tyler when he found his step-father. Do you feel like telling us about it?"

Andrea hesitated, warning herself to be careful. Keeping her voice level, she described how she and Gregg had driven out casually to pick up Frank. She had stayed in the car, had not gone down to the blinds.

"How did Tyler act beforehand, nervous or anything?" demanded Captain Mitchell. "I understand you and he spent

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the afternoon together in the house."

"We were playing records," said Andrea. "He seemed about as usual."

"Why did he come back at noon in the first place? Don't most of your guests make a day of shooting?"

"Yes." Jim Clayton answered for her. "But Gregg Tyler was never a real hunting fan."

"A good shot though?"

"Excellent."

The captain turned back to Andrea. "I understand that you and young Tyler had dinner and danced up at the Beach last night. You like him pretty well, don't you?"

"I had not seen him for years until the night before last," Andrea said. "I was just a kid when he used to come down here before the war."

"But you got pretty friendly last night," Captain Mitchell suggested, "according to an eyewitness."

Andrea's face flamed, as she recalled the kiss that Augie Hoag had seen and must have described to the police. Sheriff Bascom frowned unhappily.

"Now, now, Mitchell!" Her father cut in upon the questioning warningly.

The detective captain took a new attack. "I suppose you knew that Tyler had another girl up North that his step-father was rooting for."

"I'd heard something," Andrea admitted. "I'd have guessed anyhow that a man of Gregg's age would have a girl at home. I didn't know anything about how his step-father felt."

"Yes, and that's only gossip that you got from a big-mouth guide, Mitchell." Her father interfered again. He explained to her, "Augie Hoag claims to have heard Gregg and Frank arguing last night about this Lucille that Frank mentioned to us."

"I don't like that man Hoag," the sheriff said unexpectedly. "Where did you find him, Jim?"

"He found me. He came here with good references from Michigan, and I needed a guide, so—" Jim Clayton shrugged, then added, "I don't like him either, and I think the captain is putting too much importance on his gossip."

Captain Mitchell said, "Most of his stories are backed up by Jake Daley."

"Who is as jealous as a hound pup of Gregg Tyler. Everyone around these parts knows that Jake is in love with Andrea, has been for years. You know it yourself, Bascom." Jim Clayton appealed to the sheriff who nodded. Andrea's father went on, "I don't see the point in these questions. Just because a man gets himself killed, why should you pry into my daughter's feelings?"

The sheriff sighed. "It's always that way around a murder, Jim. But I guess we've asked enough for now."

IN SPITE of Captain Mitchell's frown, he let Andrea go. She and father went back up to the sitting room where Mrs. Ord served them dinner on trays. Gregg too, she said, was eating in his room.

"That poor boy! I'll never believe he shot anyone, no matter what Jake Daley and that Augie Hoag think they saw and heard." Mrs. Ord was fiercely Gregg's champion and Andrea loved her.

She went on, "And, if he did shoot Frank Baird, I wouldn't blame him, the way that step-father of his was always trying to boss him around, trying to boss everyone, as far as that goes. You can remember for yourself, Jim Clayton, how he tried to run this Club before you paid off the money he lent you."

Andrea was surprised. She had been too young at the time to realize the situation. Her father smiled wryly.

"Easy, Mother Ord," he said. "Or you'll have the police suspecting me."

"They do already," she told him promptly. "They think you might have shot him, because Frank Baird was trying

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to hoist another girl off on Gregg and keep you from having a rich son-in-law."

Both Andrea and her father stared. The housekeeper continued with her disclosures, proud of the sensation she was creating.

"And they're monkeying with the idea that our little girl herself may have had a hand in the shooting. And they've got an eye on Jake Daley."

"What on earth for?" the Claytons asked in chorus.

Mrs. Ord explained while she finished setting out their dinner. "Jake might have done the killing, so as to pin it on Gregg and get him out of the way."

"Good Lord!" murmured Andrea's father. "What next?"

Mrs. Ord walked to the door. She put her hands on her hips and made an undeniable statement. "Well, somebody killed Frank Baird."

"And who do you pick for the somebody?" asked Andrea, faintly amused. "Surely not me, or Dad, or Jake—or Gregg?"

"I pick Augie Hoag," Mrs. Ord said. "He's got an evil eye."

She left father and daughter to enjoy a feeble laugh.

When they had finished with a good but ill-appreciated dinner, Jim Clayton went downstairs to cheer his worried hunters as well as he could. Andrea changed slacks and shirt for a housecoat of turquoise satin and sat down before the fire. She did not try to read. She doubted if she would sleep at all that night. Her mind raced like a white rat in a cage.

Who had killed Frank Baird?

Logic told her that it could be, most likely was, Gregg. He had talked only last night of killing his step-father if he did not attend to his own business. Gregg gained control of his own money, his freedom to follow his chosen profession by Frank's death. He might even inherit a sizeable part of the Baird fortune since his step-father had no close relatives. Gregg had everything to gain.

"But he didn't do it," said Andrea's heart.

SHE THOUGHT of the impulsive boy that she had known. She thought of the forthright young man who had come down to Clayton's two nights ago. She thought of Gregg's lips warm on hers last night. She closed her eyes and let herself dream for a few forgetful minutes.

"Jim! Got a drink in there?"

Gregg's voice, outside the door, startled Andrea from her chair. She went quickly to let him in.

"Dad isn't here," she said. "But I—"

"I don't want a drink." Gregg came in and closed the door behind him. He spoke low-voiced. "It's just an excuse. There are troopers all over the joint who are all too ready to suspect us of conniving. That's why I gave you the deep freeze on the stairs."

He sat down, his young face lined with weariness. Andrea went over to the corner cupboard.

"You need a drink whether you want one or not," she told him. "And so do I."

She poured out two glasses of brandy and gave him one. He drank it down quickly, and reached for her hand.

"You don't think I sneaked up behind Frank and shot him," he said urgently. "Do you, Andrea?"

"Never!" Her heart answered.

He relaxed a little with the assurance. "You're sweet, Andrea. All the circumstantial evidence is against me, you know."

She nodded. There was no sense in trying to deny the undeniable.

"I've been mad enough," he went on, "to want to beat Frank up at times, and plenty of people know it. I inherit a slice of his money as well as get my hands on my own. I'm the guy anyone would pick for the job."

Andrea said thoughtfully, "Whoever

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killed Uncle Frank probably figured that out."

"And whoever he is," said Gregg, "has to be right here in the Club. As a matter of routine, Mitchell and Bascom are scouting the neighborhood for suspicious characters, but it doesn't seem likely that some unknown just walked in, picked the right blind and borrowed Frank's gun to shoot him."

"Did any of the other guests here now ever have business dealings with him?" Andrea asked.

"I don't think so, but I'm not sure. I haven't been closely in touch with Frank since I've been out of the Navy," Gregg told her. "I've asked Sheriff Bascom to make a check-up on pasts. I hope—I think he will. He seems like an honest, thorough cop."

"Dad likes him." She gave him what reassurance she could; then asked, "Another glass of brandy?"

He shook his fair head and rose. "I must be going. I shouldn't have come here at all, but I had to find out how you felt. It helps to know that you, at least, don't think me—a murderous monster."

"Gregg, you idiot!" She was on her own feet in a lithe movement, standing in front of him. She caught him by arms. "As if I could ever think you were anything but you!"

"Andrea—" He spoke her name brokenly.

Then, in the space of a heartbeat, his arms were around her, holding her close. She tipped up her face, and his mouth pressed down on hers. She kissed him with her eyes closed, her lips parted. She let her arms steal up around his neck. He needed the love that she had to give him.

"My dear, my dear!" Gregg's mouth took hers until the ecstasy of giving became agony. Then, with a little groan, he put her from him. "I shouldn't have done that," he said. "Forgive me, Andrea. I haven't the right."

"I know." She drew in a steadying breath and found a voice. "I know about Lucille Drew."

"Lucille?" He repeated the name in a queer voice that had a note of surprise in it, but he did not disavow her existence or her claim upon him. He said quickly, "Frank told you about her, I suppose. It's just as well."

He was turning away as he spoke. The door opened and closed upon his "Good night!"

ANDREA REMAINED standing in front of the fireplace for some time, fighting tears that could do no good. She could not reclaim her heart by crying. She could not win a heart that belonged to someone else. Tears would not have Gregg out of his present danger.

The guests at Clayton's Gun Club were ardent hunters. Neither rain nor snow nor murder could stop them. To a man and woman, except for Gregg, they availed themselves next morning of police permission to go down to the blinds, which troopers would patrol.

Their departure from the lodge suited the plan that Andrea had made during the night. It was not much of a plan and she had small hope of it achieving any successful result. She rose early and went down, with some misgivings, to propose it to Mrs. Ord.

"With police all over the place and everyone upset, there's going to be extra work around here. I was thinking that I might take over the care of the bedrooms and leave Jessie free to give you more help in the kitchen."

"And leave you free to search our customers' luggage." Mrs. Ord was not easily deceived. She laughed at Andrea's guilty face. "I had the same idea myself," she admitted. "And I was going to ask Jessie to do it."

"I'd have done it too," said Jessie. Coming in from the dining room with

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breakfast dishes, she had overheard. She put down the dishes and came up to speak to Andrea with all the recent hostility gone from her voice and eyes. "I've been remembering Gregg as a big kid," she told her. "And I think the whole world's gone crazy. Gregg wouldn't shoot his stepfather or anyone else."

"Jessie—" Andrea's voice broke on a sob and Jessie put her arms around her and hugged.

"I've been a heel lately," she said. "But I'm so much in love with that big lug, Jake. I love him, I guess, the way you love Gregg."

The two girls cried in each other's arms until Mrs. Ord reminded them that there was work to be done. Jessie went upstairs with Andrea to get her started on her new chores. It was good to have Jessie's friendship back. It was the only bright spot in a day of disappointment and growing tension.

WORKING feverishly, Andrea cleaned bedrooms and took the opportunity to go through the dresser drawers, bags, and pockets of absent guests. She was ruthless and painstaking but she found not a scrap of paper that would connect any of the hunters with Frank Baird. She had not expected that she would, but it had been a way to keep business, and there had been just an off chance that she might find something that would divert suspicion from Gregg.

Downstairs, a trooper sat on open guard duty in the hall. Captain Mitchell and Sheriff Bascom came and went. Except when summoned for intermittent questioning, Gregg remained in his room in order to spare the Gun Club embarrassment. He was not yet under official arrest.

"But he'll go to jail for sure tomorrow morning," said Andrea's father, "unless the sheriff gets something on someone else around here. So far everybody seems to be in the clear, according to the reports that have been coming in to the police from the home towns."

Unhappy, Andrea left him to take off the cap and apron in which she had been working. Passing the game room, she saw Captain Mitchell answering questions directed at him by two men with notebooks whom she guessed to be reporters.

"We can safely predict an arrest within twenty-four hours or less," Andrea heard the captain announce importantly as she hurried for the kitchen.

"Any luck?" asked Mrs. Ord.

Andrea shook her head discouragedly. "There doesn't seem to be a guest in the house who had any contact with Frank Baird, except down here."

The housekeeper looked off into space with a thoughtful frown. "Did you shake down Augie Hoag's room?" she wanted to know.

"No," said Andrea, surprised by the question. "What would a guide have to do with a man like Frank Baird?" She had cleaned both Augie's and Jake's rooms but had not searched them.

"You never can tell," Mrs. Ord said darkly. "It doesn't pay to slight anyone. And that Augie's a bad one to my mind. Those pale green eyes of his give me the creeps."

Andrea thought it foolish but thoroughness was always a good policy. And guide or not, Augie Hoag was a stranger. She looked out at the yard where Augie and Jake were getting into the Club station wagon to go after the hunters and bring them home to dinner.

"I'll go up and search him now," she told Mrs. Ord.

The search of Augie's room promised to be brief and simple. His dresser yielded only the kind of clothing that would be possessed by any guide. Neither there nor in his cheap suitcase did she find any letters or papers. The very lack was puzzling, and made Andrea run her fingers over the lining of the suitcase. She struck

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a slight bulge that felt like papers.

EXCITEMENT POUNDING in her throat, she investigated further and found a slit at the edge of the lining. She thrust her hand inside and pulled out a cheap business-size envelope. It was sealed but she tore it open recklessly.

She examined the contents. They were scant, a luggage claim ticket, a driver's license from the State of Michigan made out to August Hoag, and a packet of new fifty dollar bills. Ten of them, Andrea counted. That was five hundred dollars. That was considerable cash for a guide to be carrying around, and in such form. She gave the license and the claim check a closer examination.

The license read: *August Hoag. . . weight, 145. . .height, 6'1". . .age, 62 years. . .hair, gray. . .eyes, brown*

It was the last item which made Andrea catch her breath. Like Mrs. Ord, she had noticed Augie's eyes. They were a singularly cold pale green. Even the most careless of license clerks could not call them brown. The weight she judged to be approximately right, but Andrea was positive that Augie was under six feet by two inches and in his middle forties.

She turned her attention to the claim check. It had a familiar look. Studying it, she was reminded of Washington, where she had gone to school for two years and worked last spring and summer.

The claim check came from the Union Station in Washington. She had checked hand luggage there many times.

Moving swiftly, Andrea returned the money to its envelope and tucked it back behind the lining. The claim check and the driver's license she put in the pocket of the apron that she had not yet removed. She straightened the room and left swiftly. She was sure that she had something that Sheriff Bascom should see, but she paused in the hall outside.

Jake Daley's room was next door. It was doubtful if it would yield anything but she decided to make her search complete. She went in, closing the door behind her.

It did not stay closed, however. She was on the floor going through Jake's suitcase, in which she had found nothing more interesting than a four-year-old snapshot of herself, when it opened. Jake gaped at her from the doorway.

"And what do you think you're doing in here?"

Recovering from his first astonishment, he was upon her in swift strides, yanking her to her feet.

"What does it look like?" Andrea hid her embarrassment with a show of defiance. "And take your hands off me," she ordered. "I hate you, and I don't want to even talk to you after the lies you told the police."

He released her. He said, aggrieved, "I just told them what I saw and heard, no lies."

"You exaggerated everything so that it sounded like lies," she said. "And Gregg's going to be arrested for shooting his stepfather."

"I'm sorry about that, I really am, but that doesn't explain your snooping in my room." Jake realized suddenly that he was side-tracked. "Suppose you tell me what it's all about, or shall I guess?"

"I'm looking for something that might help Gregg," Andrea told him, "in your room just as in everyone's else. Any objections?"

Jake's "Yes" was unconditional. "I'm not worried about what you might find in my room. But you mind find something in someone's else that would be hot stuff, if Gregg didn't shoot his old man as you and your father and Mrs. Ord—and now Jess—seem to think." He paused and then asked anxiously, "Did you find anything, kid?"

"Do you think I'd tell you, if I did?" demanded Andrea.

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SHE WALKED out of the room with her firm little chin uplifted. Within the matter of moments, she had decided that no one in the house would see the papers in her pocket until Sheriff Bascom had passed upon their importance. Her father would not approve of her going through an employee's belongings. Mrs. Ord and Jessie might talk. Captain Mitchell, his mind set upon Gregg's guilt, would have no interest in her find.

Hurrying to get dressed for dinner and find the sheriff, it did not occur to Andrea until much later that Augie Hoag might have come upstairs with Jake and been listening, through thin walls, to the quarrel.

Both Andrea and her father ate in the dining room that night to give a semblance of normalcy to the club. Going downstairs in the gala sweater and skirt that she had worn three nights ago, she found the ever-present trooper in the lower hall. He informed her, upon inquiry, that Sheriff Bascom had gone to his office and might or might not be back that night. Another trooper did guard duty out in the kitchen with a duck dinner in front of him.

Andrea was not entirely sorry for his presence. It prevented Mrs. Ord from asking her embarrassing questions about her search of Augie's room, and Jake from scolding her further.

Gregg did not appear at dinner and, for Andrea, it was a dreary endless meal. She escaped to the upstairs sitting room as soon as she could. Her father remained below with his guests. Once again, she was alone when Gregg rapped on the door.

Tonight he spoke her name, and she fairly flew to let him in. "Gregg," she said. "I'm so glad."

He gave her a one-sided grin that was a trifle wry.

"Maybe you won't be, when you find out that I've come in righteous wrath," he told her.

Andrea arched delicate black eyebrows. "Why should you be angry at me?"

"Why," Gregg countered the question, "are you playing girl detective, searching people's rooms, generally making a worry of yourself?"

"Jake!" cried Andrea. "That tattle-tale."

"He's a sensible young man." Gregg became very serious. "He's alarmed for your safety and he came to me, because he thinks I might have some influence with you. Do I, Andrea?"

She avoided his eyes, her cheeks hot. "You know you have."

He came close and put a hand beneath her chin to make her look at him. "Then stop this dangerous nonsense, and if you've found out anything that may be important, tell me. Where Jake is alarmed, I'm scared nearly to death. He only thinks I didn't shoot Frank. I know I didn't, and that makes it almost certain that someone else in this house did. And, if this someone suspects you of having information dangerous to him, you're not safe. Don't you realize that?"

She was trembling to the touch of his hand on her face but she managed a light laugh.

"Don't be ridic, lamb," she told him. "What could happen to me in a Gun Club swarming with police and armed outdoor men. As for finding anything, I seem to be a very poor detective."

"I'm glad," he said. "I only hope no one gets the notion that you're good." He paused and added in a lower voice, as if to himself. "I don't think I could stand it if anything happened to you."

"Gregg," she whispered, and swayed toward him as if drawn by a magnet.

Her blue eyes and her trembling lips were all invitation, and his arms went around her. He kissed her as he had never kissed her before, fiercely, hungrily. And she knew that she would never forget the shape of his mouth against hers, or the

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beat of his heart that her own took up.

For a blazing, incredibly sweet moment, Andrea could believe that he was hers, just as she was his. She lifted a slim hand to trace the line of his cheek, and the gesture seemed to rouse Gregg from whatever madness her own desire had plunged him. He took his mouth from hers.

He said, "You can buy me a drink, if you'll be so kind, lady. And then I'll be on my way."

Andrea sought the liquor cabinet quickly to blink back, unseen, the tears that crowded to her eyes.

ANDREA'S FATHER came up a few minutes after Gregg had gone, and most of the guests came with him. The rest followed within a half hour. The Gun Club grew quiet. Andrea went into her own room, but did not undress. She had transferred Augie's driver's license and claim check from apron pocket to her sweater front. She could feel the scratch of paper against her soft flesh.

She wished that Sheriff Bascom had returned, but he had not. Andrea began to grow nervous. Jake's and Gregg's warnings were taking belated effect.

The trooper, no doubt, still sat down in the hall. She thought of him and rose with sudden resolution. The license and the claim check belonged in the hands of the law. She would not wait for the sheriff. She would give them to the state policeman.

Moving softly so as to awaken no one, she slipped from her room and tip-toed down the dimly lighted second floor hall. The doors of all the rooms appeared closed. There was no sound anywhere. It was spooky. Andrea was half tempted to turn back. Then she remembered the policemen below, one at the front door, one in the kitchen. She proceeded to the head of the stairs where she paused to look down.

That was when the blow came. It came around the corner from the shadowy stairs that led to the third and top floor of the Gun Club. Andrea did not see it coming.

There was a split second of consciousness, in which she saw a dark figure leap from the door of Gregg Tyler's room. Then something cracked her on the side of the head and the world exploded in pain. She felt herself half falling, half sliding down the stairs. She fell into blackness.

Andrea struggled out of a humming pit to find herself in the game room that seemed to swarming with people. Tender hands held hers. A familiar voice spoke her name with strange, aching tenderness.

"Andrea, Andrea darling!"

She opened her eyes wide, painfully and found Gregg bending over her, his face white and haggard. A trooper was beside him.

The trooper said, "She's coming around. You tackled him in time to keep him from getting in a real sock, if that's what you did."

Another male voice chimed in. "Captain Mitchell and the sheriff will be here with a doctor in a minute or two and we'll get this straight."

The room began to swing into focus for Andrea. She recognized the uniformed man that had been eating duck in the kitchen. He had Augie Hoag in a chair and was standing guard over him, a police automatic in his hand. She struggled to sit up and her father and Jake Daley came up to the leather couch on which she was lying.

Jake said, "You're all right, kid. Thanks to Gregg being on the job."

"This guy here says it's the other way around." The trooper guarding Augie argued without much conviction.

"He's a liar," Jake was positive. "I saw it, I tell you. I heard him leave the room and got to wondering what he was up to. Finally, I got into my pants and was coming down when he swung at Andrea with the lead pipe and Gregg made his flying tackle."

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NEITHER ANDREA nor anyone else did find out just what had happened until the Captain and sheriff arrived with a doctor who bound her head and stopped its terrible aching. The sheriff brought out the story over Augie's desperate denials.

He had been lurking on the stairs, waiting an opportunity to slip down to her room and kill her, when she appeared —a ready victim. Gregg had saved her, as Jake had tried to testify. Worried about her safety, he had watched the hall from a crack in his doorway for any untoward movement. He had leaped on Augie and deflected the blow that would have silenced her forever.

"What's it all about?" demanded Captain Mitchell. "Why did you try to kill Miss Clayton? Why did you shoot Frank Baird, Hoag?"

Augie whimpered. "I didn't do either. It's a frame-up."

Andrea was sitting up, leaning against Gregg. She fumbled in her sweater and spoke from the circle of his arm.

"These may explain, Sheriff Bascom!"

She handed Augie's driver's license and the claim check to one of the troopers who took them over to the sheriff. He stared at them, puzzled. But he had little figuring out to do. At the sight of the papers, Augie crumpled.

"All right, I did it!" he screamed hysterically. "I shot Baird and the kid would have paid off, if it hadn't been for this nosey girl. I knew she had that license and that claim check, after I heard her and Daley talking this afternoon and found my suitcase rifled—"

"But why?"

The question came not only from the police officers but the whole room that was crowded with Club guests in various states of dress and undress.

"You fools!" Augie looked around and answered with something like contempt. "You've taken me for a professional guide, treated me like a lackey when it suited you. You never guessed that I'd been a business man like yourselves, and I might have been one again if I'd had any luck. Once you start investigating up in Michigan, and get hold of the bag that I parked in Washington with my real papers and some decent clothes in it, you'll find out soon enough that my real name is James Bronson."

"James Bronson!" Comprehending, Gregg let out a yell that brought him the attention of the room.

He explained briefly of his step-father's plans to buy up the airplane parts factory and oust Bronson from control.

"A dirty deal," said the self-revealed Bronson. "I'm not glad I shot the rat. I only wish I could have sent you up for the killing."

Gregg said, "It was a bad business squeeze. You'll probably find this fellow crazy, when you put him up for trial."

"I doubt it." Mitchell of the State Troopers took a more cynical view. "We'll probably find the books of the company phonied to the devil. His motive in killing your step-father will turn out to be fear of an embezzlement charge instead of revenge. How about it, Hoag—or Bronson?"

Hoag kept a stubborn silence.

SHERIFF BASCOM SAID, "We can take that up later. There's something more important to find out. What happened to the real Augie Hoag? We've already contacted Michigan police and found out there was one, just in the course of routine. What did you do to him?"

The ex-guide hesitated. "I went up to see him. I'd fished and hunted him with him for years. I was going to try to talk him into letting me use his credentials and come down here where I knew Baird was coming. I found him dying of tuberculosis and I didn't have to do any talking."

"You finished him off instead."

(Please turn to page 95)

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By Bill Severn

Marriage

It didn't take long for Jan to realize that a man wants a girl he can love—not a kitchen expert!

WHEN JAN CORLEY was six, some well-meaning adult asked her, "What do you want to be when you grow up, little girl?" she answered, "Married." As a Girl Scout, she won all the honors for cooking and sewing. In school, Jan's domestic science teacher said she was the best pupil who had ever baked a cake. Everybody she knew admitted Jan would make some man a wonderful bride. "She was born to be a housewife," they all agreed. The only

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on her Mind

"Careful," Mark said across the room. "She's a dangerous woman."

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trouble was—a bride had to have a husband.

She was blonde and quite beautiful and knew how to dress to make the most of her loveliness. Crossing the station to the taxi stand, Jan smiled a bit over the male glances that followed her. The cab driver gave her a healthily masculine grin when he asked, "Where to?"

"Elm Avenue—2709." She settled back in the seat and shut her eyes. The glances and the grins didn't count. Not even the words. Tom Wendell had said, "You're so very lovely with the moonlight on you like this, Jan." Tom had gone with her for a month, but he hadn't asked the question that rings the wedding bells. Larry Hanson had said, "Dancing with you is like wrapping my arms around a cloud." Larry had eloped with a silly little fluff of a girl who didn't know the difference between a skillet and a can-opener. And Paul Martin, Sid Bartlett, Fred Maugham—how often can a girl hope and plan and watch the plans fall flat?

Mom had said, "Don't be so serious, dear. You're young yet." Yes, but not as young as her sister, Betsy. And Betsy had a husband, a darling baby boy, a home Jan hadn't wanted to visit. She was glad Betsy and Mark were happy, of course. But she couldn't help feeling envious. Coming here for a visit pointed up her own failure so sharply, she had avoided the trip as long as possible.

There really was no way Jan could refuse when the office decided to send her to Madison City to do some personal trouble-shooting on the Holden Department Store account. Holden's had dropped the whole line of Friendly Thought greeting cards. The store was an important, exclusive outlet and the usual sales letters had brought no satisfactory results. "But that's wonderful," Betsy had told her on the phone. "Of course you'll stay with us. We're dying to see you, Jan. We have plenty of room to put you up."

The taxi stopped in front of a newly painted, cottage-type house that matched the others in the suburban row along Elm Avenue. There was no dream stuff about it, just an ordinary, solid home. But it was part of Jan's dream. There was a play pen in the front yard and a scatter of toys; rose bushes beside the walk that were bare of flowers now, but in summer the blooms must have been lovely; evidence everywhere of the marriage Betsy and Mark had built.

JAN PUT her sample case down next to her week-end bag and pressed the bell, listening to it chime melodiously inside. The door opened and her smile caught with surprise as she glanced up at the man who stood there buttoning the white shirt he apparently had just put on. Spots of water showed through it and his uncombed dark hair was shower-wet. Obviously, the deep-tanned, pleasant-faced young man lived here. "Sorry," Jan said. "I must have the wrong house. They all look so much alike." She checked the number over the bell, 2709. She frowned. "But isn't this—"

"You must be Jan." He opened the door all the way and reached for her bags. "I'm Steve Cooper. Betsy's out shopping for supper." His eyes touched over her briefly again and he smiled. "It does run in the family, doesn't it?"

"What?"

"The way you look." He stepped aside. "Come on in. We were expecting you, but Betsy wasn't sure what train."

Steve Cooper. Jan remembered now, and the memory came to her with a shock. Steve, the romantic; Steve, the wild. He had been Betsy's star-gathering big moment her last year in college, before she had met Mark. She recalled the picture Betsy had on her bureau during vacation. The features were the same. He seemed

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a trifle older and perhaps slightly more mature, but still boldly handsome, almost dangerously attractive. What was he doing here?

"We came close to meeting each other a couple of times," he said. "I used to hear a lot about you, Jan."

"Yes." She had heard a lot about him, too. Reckless, irresponsible, all the things that had made Mom sigh with relief when Betsy finally gave him up for Mark.

"Your room's all ready." He nodded to the stairs. "Right up there. I'll show you. There's still enough hot water if you want a shower after your trip. Betsy warned me to leave you enough."

"Not right away." Jan's frown deepened. He certainly made himself at home. "She didn't say anything about having a guest."

"Me? I'm not, really." He laughed. "Part of the family until I get myself straightened out. Just got back home this week. Betsy and Mark insisted I bunk with them awhile. They know how tired I am of hotels. I work with Mark at the *Daily Star*. We were pals, you know. That's how Betsy met him." He smiled again. "Though I've never forgiven Mark for that part of it."

Jan climbed the steps ahead of him. The room had been tidied, everything was in place for her visit except the terry cloth robe and the bra and stockings that had been tossed on the bed. Steve picked them up. "Betsy took a nap while I played papa with little Butch. Swell kid. Betsy couldn't keep her eyes open. We were up most of the night talking over old times."

The door opened downstairs and there was a light tap of heels in the lower hall. "Steve?" It was Betsy. "Did she come?"

"Hi," Jan called. She hurried down to her sister.

"Jan." Betsy hugged her. "This is swell." She kept Jan's hands. "You look wonderful. How's Mom?"

"Fine. You look good, too." Betsy did. She was radiant; she looked like the happiest woman in the world. "But you should have told me you had company. I hate to crowd in like this."

"Steve? He lives here—as long as he can stand the disorderly boarding house we run." Betsy laughed and turned to him. "Come on, you handsome hulk of strength. I need help with the groceries. The bag broke and Butch is teething on a beer can. Be right back, Jan."

He grinned and followed Betsy down the walk toward the car. "All you ever had to do was ask. My strength is yours to command, beautiful."

"Hush!" Betsy's grin matched his an instant. "Do you want to start a scandal? What will the neighbors think?"

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Jan went with them. "Can't I help?"

BETSY TOOK Butch from the canvas bucket seat at the front of the car, bouncing him and hugging him with a quick kiss as she put him in Jan's arms. "This is your only aunt, young man. See that you mind your manners." She smiled to Jan. "Better hold him out a little. I'm—not sure."

Jan laughed and held him close. Butch smiled up at her like a wrinkled little old man. He had a fat face and the kind of big blue eyes that would make a lot of girls fall in love with him some day. Jan was in love with him now. He was all warm and gurgly and everything she wanted in her own. "He's darling."

"We think so," Betsy said. "But then, Mark and I are prejudiced."

Steve's head tilted to the side as he studied Jan. "You look good with one." His grin came back. "You should be a mother."

She laughed again. "I guess I'll wait until I'm married."

"Might be wise."

Betsy joined in the laughter and gave his shoulder a playful shove. "If you must banter with my sister, can't you wait until we get the groceries into the house? She'll be here awhile. But I ought to warn you that better men than you have tried."

"My intentions are strictly honorable." He winked to Jan. "Will you marry me?"

She smiled. "No."

"Well, I guess that's settled." Steve hefted the bag to his other arm and went up the steps into the house.

Upstairs, while she was helping Jan unpack, Betsy said, "Steve's been wonderful to Mark. Poor Mark, you know how he is about speaking up for himself. And I didn't want to nag him about a raise. But Steve really laced it into them at the office. Mark deserved more money. He's been on the desk for six months now."

"Steve has that much influence?"

"They'd give him the presses if he asked. Steve's handed the *Star* more big news breaks than any ten other correspondents. He won all sorts of awards for the stories he wrote from London on the international conferences. Didn't you read about how he got into Russia by parachute? And the polar expedition—just came back from covering that."

"Sounds as if he gets around."

"He's been everywhere, has done almost everything. It's so exciting to listen to him, Jan. Steve never stays any place long enough to get his hat hung up. And all the important people he knows personally. But I mean, he's so swell about it. He's not bragging or acting the big shot—just the same friendly guy. Well, you saw how he was."

"Yes"—Poor Mark; exciting Steve. Jan knew better than to imagine things about Betsy, but her sister's unconscious comparison worried her. It wasn't so long ago that Steve and Betsy had thought they were in love and for all their easy-going laughter, some of the attraction was still there. Not that either of them would make anything of it; Betsy loved Mark and Steve did seem nice. But it was a situation which could breed discontent and misunderstanding that might lead to serious trouble. Surely, Betsy must realize how much more she had here, in her home and her marriage and Butch, than all the romantic excitement a footloose adventurer could give her? Jan mentally shook herself for wondering. Certainly, Betsy realized it. Her sister wasn't a fool.

AND YET, the tiny doubt crept back into Jan's mind when Mark came home. He kissed Jan lightly and teased her a bit, the way he always did. But his humor seemed a trifle forced. "I still say Betsy was lucky I didn't see you first, Jan." He laughed. "I never would have

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wanted you to be only a sister-in-law."

"Conceited." Betsy made a face and went to him. She hugged him close and sighed. "But maybe I am lucky at that."

"I'm satisfied." Mark smiled over her shoulder. "What's the matter, Steve? Not still jealous after all this time?" It was part of the little joke and there was no reason for Jan to sense anything else in the question. But it disturbed her.

"Sure, I'm jealous. And unkissed." Steve grinned. "What am I—a minority? It's not fair." He slipped his arm around Jan while her mind was still puzzling over the exchange between them. It wasn't really a kiss and Steve let her go immediately. "I feel better now," he said. But the warmth of his mouth lingered a moment on hers and she felt a quick tingling awareness stir her pulses. Silly. She glanced down.

"Careful—" Mark shook his head. "She's a dangerous woman."

"That's the second time I've been warned," Steve said. "The frivolous type, eh? Leading men on and breaking their hearts. No wonder you wouldn't marry me. Okay, just for that, I won't marry you. Anyhow, you probably can't cook."

"That's me." Jan looked up. "Just a playgirl out for a good time."

She helped Betsy fix supper and wondered how her sister ever managed to get a meal together. There was absolutely no order to anything in the kitchen. Jan had read all the columns, all the latest books on home management; she had taken a university summer course on marriage problems. Supper was late and it seemed a miracle to Jan that it reached the table. Betsy really should do something about that kitchen. Not that Jan would say anything, but a wife should be equipped to do her job. Housekeeping was a career, the most important career any woman could have. All the books said marital happiness depended upon a wife's efficient management of her partnership.

Mark hardly seemed to notice that the salt and pepper had been left off the table and that Betsy had forgotten the butter. Steve, surprisingly, was more annoyed. Jan caught him frowning once or twice as though he were mentally criticizing.

And Betsy wasn't at all firm about putting Butch to bed when it was time. She lifted him from his high chair and when he set up a squall, she said, "Might as well let him get tired, I guess. He'll be up all night if he gets into one of his crying spells."

JAN WAS almost shocked by Mark's easy compliance. A husband wanted peace and quiet in the evening. If he loved Betsy less, he would demand it and, just because he didn't was no excuse for her sister to spoil the time they had to share alone. Butch's hour for bed should be as inflexible as any of the other rules by which a house is run. Bad for Butch, too.

"I'll take him up," Steve offered. "He should be tired. It's almost eight."

"Butch is a bit too young to tell time." Betsy smiled. "Anyhow, I wouldn't want to keep you from carrying out your resolutions."

"That's right. Four more to go." Steve winked to Mark and turned to Jan. "Would you care to go dancing?"

They laughed and Jan asked, "What's the joke?"

"You'll find out, darling," Betsy said.

"Let's go." Steve pushed back his chair and held out his hand. "Okay if we borrow the car, Mark?"

He nodded, still laughing. "Offhand, I can't think of a better use for it."

"Wait a minute." Jan shook her head. "I didn't say I would. I'd like to, but I have work to do, Steve. An early appointment tomorrow morning. Maybe some other night while I'm here."

"Work?"

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"Jan's in the greeting card business," Betsy explained.

"Oh? 'Violets are blue and I love you'?"

"Something like that." Jan smiled. "Anyhow, I didn't bring a dress or anything."

"You're dressed. And very pretty, too. This is strictly informal. Please, Jan." He took her hand. "Don't tell me a playgirl like you would give up her fun to sit home and brood about work? Besides, Mark and Betsy want us to clear out."

They protested, but Mark did look like he would enjoy an evening alone with his wife. They probably hadn't had much chance to be by themselves since Steve had come to visit. "All right," she said slowly. "At least, let me put on fresh make-up."

"Two minutes." Steve grinned and glanced at his watch.

Jan was closer to twenty minutes. She hadn't an evening gown with her and Betsy's would have been too small, but she did change her suit for her new slim-skirted black with the cascading circular ruffles down the back. The off-shoulder neckline had a ribbon-woven chain of tiny silver bells.

Steve tapped on the door as she was fixing her lipstick. "You were beautiful to start with," he said. "What more can you do to yourself that takes this long?"

It was bad to keep a man waiting, all the advice Jan had read said so. It showed lack of self-discipline. But she didn't have to impress Steve. A roving, home-shunning man like Steve wouldn't be any girl's candidate for a husband, even if—well, even if. This was strictly for laughter. "Sorry—"

He looked at her and whistled softly. "I'm not." He took her arm. "It was worth waiting for." He shook his head. "So you didn't bring anything to wear?"

"Not to go dancing. But I guess I can make this one do on such short notice."

"You know darned well it'll do. What did you make it with—moonbeams? Some little thing you ran up on the machine one rainy afternoon, I suppose?"

Jan started to tell him she had made it herself. Not in one afternoon, but two evenings. She made all her own clothes. But she decided Steve wouldn't be interested; there was no need to sell her wifely abilities to him.

MAYBE THAT was why the evening became such fun. There were no dreams of the future, no serious questions to ask or to answer. "Steve never stays any place long enough to get his hat hung up," Betsy had said. Jan was gay, laughing with him, jokingly returning his brand of teasing. And Steve was fun. He was a wonderful way to spend an evening. "What about those resolutions?" she asked. "Sounds mysterious."

"We'll come to that. Later."

They found a small night club out the highway past the city line. Steve took her in his arms and she lost herself to the music. There wasn't a thought in her head beyond now. Jan drifted to the easy rhythm of their dancing, conscious of herself only as part of the music; conscious of him only as a man who was good to dance with.

He held her close while the carnival-colored spotlight wove its rainbows into the pattern of the night. Above them, a slowly revolving mirrored ball tossed the colors back again in a scatter of tiny reflections on the otherwise darkened floor. A muted trumpet reached for the high notes of a love song, but the saxophones chased it with a romping countermelody.

The music ended and Jan didn't want it to stop. She blinked at the sudden brilliance that lighted the club for the floor show and reluctantly moved back from him. "Let's find some place else," Steve said. "Unless you'd like to hear some

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comedian tell a lot of antique jokes."

"I'd rather listen to you."

"Is that a compliment?" He grinned and took her hand. "My best line and you act as if you've heard it all before. But then, you probably have. I'm afraid I'm not very original."

"Oh, but it's good. I can't remember when I've been handed a better one. You've probably tested it all over the world."

"Seven different languages."

In the car, Steve lightly put his arm around her and eased her head down on his shoulder. Jan found a soft spot that seemed made for her cheek and leaned back contentedly. It was part of being with him, part of pretending and liking each other. Maybe before he said good night, he would kiss her and maybe she would let him. And they both would know that was pretending, too.

They drove out the highway and passed through a village of small stores, most of them dark now. Abruptly, Steve slowed the car and parked at the curb. "Won't be a minute." He opened the door and got out.

"What in the world?"

"Just thought of something."

PUZZLED, she watched him cross to the drug store. He came back with a small box under his arm. He put it in her lap. "It should have started with flowers and candy," he said. "Sorry, they had no flowers."

She laughed and looked up at him, shaking her head. "Silly," she said. "Crazy." Jan felt her eyes fill with the warmth of that soft laughter. "But nice. Thank you, Steve."

"And this." He took an envelope from his pocket. "The man had to hunt back on the shelf for it. A little out of season, but the sentiment is there."

Jan opened the envelope and held the card close to the dashboard light. There was a paper lace heart as big as any a boy had ever carved on a tree for a girl. Inside it were the words YOU and ME. A drawing of a boy on his knees to a girl and: BE MY VALENTINE.

"Steve—"

He got in next to her and backed the car up. "Since you're in the business, you probably get them wholesale, but it was an idea."

Jan didn't look at him. "Wholesale," she said, "they don't count."

Steve drove through the village and when they were beyond it, he pulled to the side of the road again. "Those resolutions." He grinned, but his eyes were half-serious and his manner somehow changed. "I made them while I was with the expedition. I was telling Betsy and Mark last night." The headlights of an-

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other car swept past them and he was silent until the hum of tires faded. "Our outfit had a pretty tight time of it for awhile. Ice and snow and wind, locked in at the top of the earth, and not too much chance we'd ever get back. Covering that weather survey was a big story, but it made me realize how small I was, Jan. I saw myself. I lived my life over again in my mind. We all did, I guess. We talked about the good things, what we missed, what we'd do if we came out of it alive. When the rescue planes spotted us, I knew what I wanted."

"Four things you wanted most?"

"Five to start." He smiled. "One resolution was to get the biggest, thickest steak I could find. That doesn't sound like much, but when you've been close to starving—Betsy had steak for me last night."

"And the others?"

"I wanted to kiss a pretty girl under the stars."

"Oh—" That was what Betsy and Mark had been laughing about. "Just any girl?"

There was longing in Steve's kiss—desire, too. He held her gently, and he wasn't laughing. The grin was gone, his joking abruptly ended in this.

And something came of the night that Jan hadn't wanted; something that couldn't be. Not Steve. He couldn't give her a home, a family, everything marriage had to be. This was for laughs, for fun, the tender pretense. Jan touched his arms, his shoulders. Her eyes shut, she drew herself close and kissed him while her hands went around him and her heart stilled her breathing. Her mind fought, but the rest of her was his.

"Jan—"

Yes, she was Jan. Not this girl in his arms. She turned away. "That's the second resolution, Steve." Her own voice sounded strange to her, the words trying too hard to cover what she still felt beneath them; words struggling to hide their own emotion. "What are the rest?"

Steve sat back and didn't answer her.

SHE MOVED over on the seat and looked out the far side of the car, trying to fix the image of each real thing she saw there and root its reality in her mind. Anything, everything that would take her from him and stop the wild racing of her pulses. The trees and a fence and an odd-shaped boulder, the white line down the center of the highway, the car approaching in the other direction with only one headlight, the stars. No, not the stars. She looked down. "You'd rather not tell me?"

"Jan, I—" He broke off. He turned on the ignition and started the motor. He swung around to head back toward Madison City. "There was one for Betsy. One of the good things I remembered. Seeing a sunset with her. And I wanted to dance with some girl until dawn."

"Not tonight." Jan managed a little laugh. "After all, I do have to work tomorrow."

"No, not tonight." He gripped the wheel high with both hands. "Sure, you have your job. That comes first, doesn't it? That and fun and all the things you want to do. The full life, Jan, I know. That's how it always was with me."

"Steve—"

"We should have stayed at that club and heard the comedian. You missed a lot of laughs."

Mr. Holden broke his morning appointment and wasn't at all glad to see Jan when she finally got into his office at the department store late that afternoon. He let her quote sales figures and prices, let her show him the samples of the new product, sat back in his desk chair through it all. "Your company wasted its time sending you here," he said finally. "Perhaps the line sells in the bigger cities. Not here. This is a family community, Miss

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Corley. Our customers don't like to make fun of the things in which they believe."

"I'm afraid I don't understand."

"You used to put out a good product." He flipped open the book. "Look at it now. No sentiment, no romance, nothing a greeting card should be. Look at this Valentine job. Makes a joke of it and a bitter joke at that. Perhaps Valentine's Day is corny. But what it stands for isn't. Folks in Madison City believe in wedding anniversaries and Mother's Day and birthdays. They've got hearts. Your line is just too cold, that's all."

It was still in Jan's mind when she reached the house. She would write up a report and send it in and then she might as well be leaving too. There was no reason to stay in Madison City now.

Betsy let her in. Steve wasn't there. Jan explained to her sister. "I hate to cut my visit short," she said, "but I'm not on vacation. Maybe later in the year I can make it again—maybe with Mom."

"Gosh." Betsy frowned. "Well, of course if you have to go, Jan—"

"I should."

"I would hate to disappoint Steve." She shook her head. "But I guess I can arrange things."

"Steve?"

"He's driving me out to the lake."

Jan stared at her. "You have a date with him?"

"Silly." Betsy laughed. "It's not like that. Mark knows about it. We all had lunch together. Steve's got this idea about wanting to take me out to the lake to see the sunset?"

"And Mark doesn't care?"

"Goodness, why should he? It doesn't mean anything really. We were all joking about how Steve remembered a moment like that when he was frozen in up north. I was sort of counting on you to fix supper for Mark and take care of Butch until Steve and I got back. But I guess I can leave things ready for Mark and one of the neighbors will mind Butch, if you have to go right away."

"Leave supper for your husband while you have a date with Steve?" Jan gripped her arm. "Betsy, you can't do this! It's crazy. I don't care what Mark understands."

"There's no need to get upset."

"Well, I am! It—it's wrong, that all."

"Darling, I love Mark. He loves me." Betsy faced her. "You've never been in love or you'd know what that means. Trusting all the way, truly understanding." She looked down a minute. "A long time ago, I gave Steve something so beautiful he remembered it when he thought he was going to die. That doesn't mean he wants me now. He doesn't. Steve's never so much as looked at me that way since I've been Mark's. But this—Oh, how can I explain? You're so darned unromantic." She raised her head. "I'm going with Steve. Come on, I'll help you pack. I have to dress."

"I'll stay for supper," Jan said slowly. "I can take a train in the morning."

"You still don't see how it's different, do you?" Betsy smiled. "Sometimes, I feel sorry for you, Jan."

STEVE CAME for Betsy in Mark's car. Jan remained upstairs with Butch until she heard the front door shut. She didn't want to see Steve. She was afraid of what she would say to him. And saying it wouldn't help, with Betsy as blind as she was.

Mark came home later on the bus. Jan felt so sorry for him, she could have cried. Sorry for Betsy, too. She grew angrier at Steve every minute Betsy was gone.

"Well, what do you think of my wife?" Mark laughed. "Stepping out on me."

"You could have stopped her."

"Why?"

There was an answer for that, but Jan didn't say it. She fixed supper efficiently,

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handled Butch so that he hardly cried at all. She took time to straighten things in the kitchen a bit, too. Jan had to do something to keep her hands busy. But she couldn't reorganize the house in one night. She gave up finally and went into the living room to sit with Mark. She glanced at her watch. "It's almost seven-thirty."

"So it is." Mark went to the radio. "Sports Round-up is on. Will it bother you if I tune it in?"

"Bother me?" Jan got to her feet. "Stop being so noble, Mark."

"What do you mean?"

"Betsy." Jan stood beside him, waiting for him to look up. "She's your wife and she's in love with you. I know it and you know it. But—"

He twisted the dial. "Bit of static. Looked like rain when I was coming home. Hope they don't get drenched with the top down."

"Mark!"

"Take it easy, Jan." He listened to the radio a second and straightened. "Steve doesn't worry me. He's in love with you."

"He—*what?*"

"I thought you knew."

"Oh, sure. That's why he went out with Betsy." Her little laugh was flat.

"It could have something to do with it. Steve wants what Betsy gave me. All this business of remembering a beautiful moment is nothing but twisting that longing around in his mind. He doesn't realize it maybe, but what he said amounts to the same thing. Steve's tired of knocking around all over the world. Maybe he was before he went up north. Anyhow, that squared it off. He wants to settle down. Steve's already done part of it. He talked the boss into making him foreign news editor of the *Star* so he can stay right here in Madison City."

"Steve told you?"

"That he's in love with you. So much in love with you, he's afraid of it. Because that isn't the kind of love he wanted. He thinks you're not ready for marriage—too gay to settle down. And he promised himself he'd find a wife who could manage things and make him a home."

"Mark!" Jan hugged his arm. That was Steve's last resolution. The one he hadn't told her about. "But I can. Oh Mark, that's what I want, too."

"I guess you could do something about it." Mark smiled. "I thought you were giving Steve the brush like all the other guys, Jan."

She shook her head. "They gave me the brush." She lifted her chin. "But Steve won't. He's not just a guy. *The* guy, Mark. The only one." Her heart sang with it. Jan would show Steve the kind of a home she could make, the housekeeper she could be. It was all here for her. She would cook and clean and make the house sparkle. She would stay a week, a month, as long as Steve stayed. As long as it took.

THERE was a rumble of thunder and a flash of light. Rain struck the window with a sudden splash. Even that seemed to be with her. Betsy was dripping wet and sneezing when she and Steve drove home. "You'll catch cold." Jan led her sister to the stairs. "Get those wet clothes off and take a hot shower, Betsy. Don't worry about Butch. He's been an angel for me. I'll get him tucked into bed."

"But Steve and I haven't eaten." Betsy blinked. "I'll have to fix a snack."

"I'll fix it." Jan moved her up the steps. "Take your time and put on something warm."

"What's all the fuss? You don't have to baby me, Jan. I've been out in the rain before. I won't—" Betsy stopped and gave her a queer little look. She smiled and then laughed. "I get it. Wouldn't be showing off, would you?" Betsy put her hand on Jan's arm and her fingers

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squeezed tight. "I'm glad. He's the swellest they come—except for Mark."

Jan hurried down to the living room. "Take your shoes off, Steve. I've got dry socks and slippers for you."

"Huh?"

"Go ahead, now. And that shirt, too, I'll get you a fresh one." She started for the stairs and Butch began to cry. "Just a second." Jan went to Butch. "What's the matter, sweet?" She tickled him. It had worked before. But not now. Butch screamed as if he had been stabbed.

"Hey!" Steve yelled. "What did you do to him?"

"N-nothing. Have you got your shoes off?"

"You brought me only one sock."

"Oh! I'll get—"

Butch howled. Laughing, Mark came over and picked him up. He felt around and found a safety pin. "Came open."

"Anybody could see that." Steve shook his head. "I'll get my socks."

Jan took a deep breath. "All right. I'll get you some supper. Soup, Steve?"

He stared at her. "Better wait and let Betsy fix it."

"You still don't think I can cook?" Jan laughed. "I've won prizes."

"Okay." He was still frowning.

JAN OPENED a can. She took spices from the closet. Not just canned soup. When Steve tasted this, he'd know the difference. She used just the right touch and put water on for the coffee. Toast would go well. She popped bread into the toaster.

Butch yelled for attention again. Jan went out to him, but Mark was already on the job. Steve came down buttoning his shirt. "Loose thread," Jan said, smiling. She pulled it. The button popped from beneath his fingers and dropped to the floor. "Oh, it wasn't sewed tight."

"I know." Steve backed a step and sniffed. "What's that?"

"The toast!" Her hand to her throat, Jan ran to the kitchen. It was filled with smoke. She lunged at the toaster and jerked back her fingers.

Steve calmly pulled the plug from the wall. With a fork, he carefully removed the black-crusted slices.

Jan's eyes filled. She turned her head. She ladled the soup into the bowls and brought them out to the table. There was a hiss behind her in the kitchen. Steve made it ahead of her. "Water," he said. "Boiled water."

"Oh. It was for the coffee."

Steve shook his head sadly. "Even I can make toast and coffee. Didn't you ever walk through the kitchen back home on your way out to go dancing?" He pulled open the drawer.

"If you'll just keep out of here, I'll have everything fixed."

"Need spoons for the soup."

They sat at the table finally. Butch crying and Jan's nerves screaming. Steve tasted the soup. He grabbed for a glass of water and spilled it. His hand clapped to his mouth, he ran to the kitchen. There was a splash. He turned the faucet. "What did you do to it?" Steve yelled.

"Shut up!" Jan got to her feet. She strode into the kitchen. "It's good soup! It's wonderful soup! I put salt in it and thyme and a touch of curry—" She saw the label on the small tin box. Dry mustard. Her lips quivered. Her tears broke.

"Jan—" Steve took her in his arms. "Darling, please." He held her close. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to shout." Gently, he raised her face between his hands and kissed her. "Jan—" He kissed her again and again. "I guess when you love somebody so much, the rest doesn't matter. You'll learn to cook. And even if you don't—"

She wanted to tell him. But it didn't seem important right now. She put her arms around him. "Yes," she said softly. "I'll learn."

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Dream Regained

By Christine Young

What can a girl expect to find when she returns to the scene of an old heartbreak?

THE CREAM-COLORED roadster raced along the winding country road as if all the furies were behind it. It slowed, approaching a little harbor, turned in at a sandy lane, and came to a stop beneath an apple-tree. The girl at the wheel scrambled out, not even bothering to slam the door shut behind her, and walked swiftly out onto one of the little piers.

She was a slim blonde girl, Candy Weatherbee, young and glowing. Her tweed suit, expensive like the long, sleek sports roadster she was driving, was the coppery brown of the autumn leaves. It matched her shining hair, cut short, and in which the red-gold sparks glinted gayly. There were sparks of excitement in her eyes, too. Amber-brown eyes, Candy's, under curling, gold-tipped lashes.

"And why shouldn't I be excited?" she asked herself breathlessly. Wasn't she home, at last, after two unbelievable years of self-imposed exile? And wasn't this the most heavenly spot in the world? Beside it, California paled, and Miami, and Bermuda. There was no place like this tiny village on the New England coast.

"And I'm not dreaming this time!" Candy exulted. "I don't have to pinch me! I'm really here! And it's all just exactly the same! Except that—" She caught her breath suddenly, sharply, and the old pain clutched her heart. Gil isn't here. Oh, Gil! Why was I such a dope as to think, even hope, that you might be.

She snatched back the thought soberly. There was no use thinking of Gil. Hadn't she known that for ages? It was over, two long years over, all that. And after two years of doggedly concentrated forgetting, any girl in her right mind would be over a man.

It didn't matter that this particular week-end was an anniversary. She hadn't insisted on coming today because of that. Or had she? Her heart suddenly stumbled. But of course not! Candy set her small chin. It was enough just to be here, feeling the old lovely magic. She wasn't a silly sentimentalist, forever looking back!

She squared her shoulders now, and looked around, her eyes dreamy. It seemed incredible that less than seven hours ago she and Jane, her married sister, and Brook, her maybe-fiancé, were driving up

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"Joe told me that you're married, Gil," she said unhappily.

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Fifth Avenue, heading north to this, a world so different. They had balked about coming, though she had said, "Just for the week end, please!"

"Then why are you taking luggage enough for a lifetime?" Jane had protested, looking suspicious. She added, "It's not that I'm not devoted to our old summer home, darling. But after all, I'm married now, and a woman of responsibilities."

She had given in at last, and Brook had insisted on joining them. "You'll need a man along to help open up that house!" he had said.

So he and Jane were busy at it now, back there in the long-closed summer cottage on the dunes. For a fleeting moment Candy felt a pang of guilt for deserting. But she had had to see the harbor before dark.

It stretched before her now, and for five o'clock of an October evening, the sea air was thrillingly mild and balmy. Later there would be a moon, nearly full. But now, across the bay, the sun was setting. A ball of orange fire, illuminating the sea and sky. Along the creek banks, sea-lavender and goldenrod stirred in the breeze with the beach grasses, and a flock of winter gulls swooped over, heading south.

"Oh, lovely, lovely!" Candy breathed, sniffing the heavenly scent of the marshes. How she had missed it, and longed for this wide reach of sea and sky. All through that first years at her father's in California, where he had lived since his divorce, when Candy was ten. And last year in Florida, with her mother. That was the life of a child of divorce, even at twenty-three! Shuttling back and forth about the country. With stop-overs in Bermuda or Arizona; visiting people. And weeks at Jane's on Long Island where, in June, she had met Brook. A glamorous life, maybe, to some people.

"But not to me!" Candy said. "Never!" Because always there was the memory of the place where she had grown up with Gil, summers. And where she had been so happy always, until two years ago tonight.

"It's an anniversary." She shivered. "But anniversaries should be happy and gay with champagne and music and a party. Oh Gil!"

AND SUDDENLY, in spite of herself, he seemed to stand beside her, tall and dashing, the most exciting, dearest person in all the world.

"Come on, honey." She could almost hear his voice. "Roll up those blue jeans. It rained last night, remember? We have to bail."

She caught her breath. How many times had they done that? Oh, a thousand, from childhood on. Was that his boat still out there? The old sailing dory? No, of course not! Not after two years.

So much had happened since that last violent quarrel, when Gil had turned on his heel and stalked out and left her, and never stalked back again. They had quarreled always, and had made up and gone on loving each other with ardor. But the last one had been different. It had involved, and for the first time, another girl.

"I expect—" Candy made herself face it, for the thousandth time—"he married her, that girl named Phyllis. He must have."

The girl whose romantic letter Candy had picked up and read, unaware, that last October afternoon, out in the boat.

"I miss you, Gil," the unknown girl had written. "Nothing's right, somehow, any more, without you. So hurry back. I'll be waiting with bells on! Yours always, Phyl."

Who she was, Candy had no way of knowing, except that Gil had said she was a hostess on an airliner he was flying then. Except for that, he had refused to talk.

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Candy shivered now, remembering. He had merely taken the note, coloring and shrugging, and stuffed it into his pocket. He had looked at her with a queer, inscrutable glint in his sea-blue eyes.

"Okay, Candy," he had said. "Have it your way. You know all the answers. I could explain, maybe, but you wouldn't believe me. That red-headed temper of yours gets in the way. You love me—oh, sure. But love without trust doesn't amount to much."

That was a sample. "I hate him! I hate him!" Candy had wept and knew that she was lying. She loved him. But love and hate seemed so all mixed up together, when you loved with all your heart.

She had hoped so furiously, that he would come back and snatch her close and whisper, "Candy, forgive me, you nitwit! Nobody else means a hoot, or ever will, to me. We belong together, we have always!"

But he had not come back. He had left for New York that night, back to his job with the airline company. And she had flown to the Coast the next day. Pride, fierce and passionate, had kept her from trying to reach him. The next move was his. But the weeks had dragged into months, a year, two years, and she had never heard a word. It was if he had dropped off the face of the earth. And she had stayed away, afraid to face the bleak memories of a love that had seemed to her to be the one secure, safe harbor in all the world.

SHE ROUSED herself now. This was stupid. In two years a shattered heart could mend. Maybe Gil had married the girl, and had forgotten. But she was going on to a bright new life now, too, with Brook. She thought of him now, as she had left him, ploughing up the sandy path to the door of the cottage with Jane, laden with luggage. She had been a wretch to run away.

"Well, how do you like that?" Jane had sputtered, glaring. "She drags us up here, then deserts us. Of all the little wretches!"

"The beautiful screwball!" Brook had shrugged, indulgently.

Indulgent. That was Brook in a nutshell—good-natured, kind and bland. Candy sighed. She loved him. Oh, yes, as much as it was in her to love anybody again, ever. And he would make a marvelous husband. Rich and handsome. Generous, dependable. He would never stalk off heartlessly and leave her to torment. And he would be faithful. There would be no wandering coolly down intriquing by-paths of romance for Brook. No, he was a one-woman man, the rock of Gibraltar. And she was lucky. What more could a girl ask? A flaming love? No! Her eyes flashed. Once was enough.

The fishing fleet was coming in on the

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evening tide. She could hear the chug-chug of the lobster boats now in the distance, down the channel. It was a steadying, peaceful sound, somehow.

And suddenly she jumped. A familiar voice floated across the shining water. A male voice. Candy blinked. She recognized its owner. The young fisherman waved to her. Joe Holmes, a childhood friend of hers, and Gil's.

"Candy! Hey, by all that's terrific!" he was shouting. "So you're back, and high time, stranger. Welcome home!"

It had such a lovely sound, that word—home. Her pulse leaped. She waved back, her eyes shining. "Oh, Joe, hello!" she cried. "Hurry in, and talk to me."

Breathless, she waited, and suddenly she knew. This was what she had come back for, really. To see Joe, or someone who might have some word of Gil for her. To recapture, anyhow, the old, heart-stopping magic for a little minute. In imagination, at least, before going on into that fine new life Brook was so hopefully planning. She had to know about Gil, first. Every mystery had to be solved, every story with its final, proper ending.

She watched the boats nosing in. She knew them all—the "Marguerite," the "Lucy Ann", the rackety old "Owl" and "Comet". She knew all their weather-beaten young skippers, too. In the old days she had spent hours out on the bay with one or another of them.

She greeted them now, her eyes shining as they passed, one by one, to say hello. Gil had grown up with most of them. And once they would have mentioned him, but not this time. It had been a good day, they said. They had made good hauls. Mackerel and tautog and flounders, even a tuna or two. They were tired and hungry, now, and bound home to the snug little houses scattered picturesquely about the moors and village; to wives in crisp checked gingham; to robust, rollicking youngsters; to a supper of chowder and apple pie. Yes, they had homes to go to.

A lovely life! Candy watched them as they left, her heart thudding. She thought, When I was seventeen I thought I'd be a fisherman's wife! She had said that to Gil. "We'll live here forever, Gil, won't we? In a little white house near the harbor, where we can always smell the sea? No more hotels or city apartments. No more of never staying put. I'll be the very best kind of fisherman's wife, darling." And Gil, four years older, had tousled her bright hair, and retorted, "You're just a baby, a sweet, funny baby, Candy." But he had liked the idea of the little house near the harbor. He needed space and freedom and the wide reaches of the sea, as much as she.

BUT THAT was before the Army had gobbled him up and away, and taught him to love flying better. Young Captain Gilman Abbott, Army Air Force, an eagle winging the skies. He had looked so terrific in his uniform, a young Viking, blond and dashing.

"You look marvelous," Candy had admitted, but added, wailing, "but why does it have to be the Air Corps? Oh, Gil, it terrifies me! You'll be very careful, won't you?"

"Of course. I'm indomitable, baby!" he had assured her gaily and very tenderly.

It hadn't stopped her from worrying, though. She shivered now, remembering those three awful years when he was flying overseas. A strange thing, such fear, in a girl so young and brave and giddy. But maybe she had felt a premonition, even then!

She whirled around suddenly now, as Joe's voice roused her. She lifted eager eyes to his, as his big paw closed hard and warm over hers. She heard his delighted exclamation, "Gosh, Candy, you're prettier than ever! Is it good to see you! Like old times!"

And suddenly she wanted to cry, "Joe,

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tell me. Let's not beat around the bush. We can talk about the unimportant things later. Right now, I have to know about Gil."

But she couldn't say that, not yet. They had to make casual conversation. And then, abruptly, Joe himself paved the way. With a sudden frown, he said, "Candy, look. It's none of my darn busness, but I can't see you without seeing Gil. What happened to you two?"

She stared. "You mean Gil didn't tell you?"

"Of course not. Gil never talked about things like that, even to me. I know you had a quarrel. But there was nothing new about that." He shrugged. "A couple of hotheads, you two, always. But you belonged together. I've never been able to make it add up."

He looked so troubled and puzzled. Candy swallowed. Not answering the question, she said, "Do you ever hear from him, Joe? I haven't in two years. And I have to know!" Her voice trembled. "Oh, Joe, it's what I came back for. Tell me."

She knew, though, before he answered. His frown told her. He said gently, "I'm sorry, Candy, but nobody ever hears from Gil. The last report was that he was flying one of the Clippers from San Antonio to Rio de Janeiro. His father died, you know, two years ago, just after you left. Gil did come back to close up the old place on the Cove, but that was the last time I saw him."

Candy's heart plunged. So Gil was really gone. And yet, this was home to him, the place he loved best in all the world, just as she did. He might have come back. Someday he must.

SHE ROUSED herself and heard Joe saying, "Well, sun's gone down. Guess I'd better get wheeling. You staying long, or just for the week-end, Candy?" He seemed oddly embarrased, almost guarded.

"I—I don't know." She heard her own voice. Then, abruptly, she clutched his arm. "Joe, answer just one more question," she said, breathless. "Did Gil marry her? The girl we quarreled over? I don't even know that. Her name was Phyllis. She was a hostess on one of the airliners he was flying."

"Yes, he married her. I supposed you knew," Joe said.

For a stunned instant Candy's heart stopped beating. Then went on, thumping jaggedly against her ribs. So it was over, really over. It was something, anyhow, to know the facts.

"Well, thanks for the news, Joe." She searched for her voice and found it. "I really didn't know. But don't feel so terrible; it doesn't matter. It's ancient history now. A lot of water has gone under the bridge since those days. Things are bound to change."

She sounded like a bright, brittle little parrot. She tried for a smile and missed.

She heard Joe say unhappily, "And what about you? In love? Or keeping a dozen poor guys dangling, doubtless?"

"Oh, no. Only one, now. I'm being married myself next month." This would be wonderful news to Brook! She hadn't told him for sure and certain. She said, "His name is Mason, and he's sweet. He wouldn't know a tautog from a bass, but he's awfully good at stocks and bonds, and I'm sure that he will make me deliriously happy."

Her voice trailed away as Joe looked at her. Poor Joe!

She said good night to him, at last, still feeling a little light in the head. She watched him hurtling off in his little truck. She clambered into the roadster and jammed her foot to the floor. The car shot ahead, missing the apple-tree by three inches.

"Well, I asked for it!" she told herself passionately. "Joe wasn't going to tell me. I didn't have to come back and dig up the past. But I'm glad I did. This is

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enough of this silly business. What did I expect?"

Her fingers clenched the wheel. She thought, He lied, that night, when he said that letter didn't mean anything. He was in love with her. But, she choked suddenly. Oh, Gil, why did you want her or anybody when I loved you so much.

Well, you couldn't turn back the clock, ever. She had been a little fool to try. Life was funny.

"Very funny!" she whispered, her face stony. But somehow she couldn't laugh.

Lights were twinkling cheerfully from the house on the dunes as she swept up the drive. It was really dark now. In October the darkness came quickly after sundown. She parked the car in the garage, which Brook had opened and left ready for her. She climbed out and closed the doors.

And then, before turning up the path to the house, she stood for one little minute, looking across the Cove toward Gil's old home.

And suddenly, her heart turned over. There was a light there! Joe had said it was closed! Could Gil have come back for the week-end? Alone, perhaps, homesick, as she was?

White and rigid, she stood and stared. It was just two years ago that his father had died, Joe said. That might have brought him. Or it might be just the caretaker, taking a look around.

Whoever, whatever, it was, she had to know! Pulses racing, she scrambled back into the car and backed it out again. She thought, I'm out of my mind. It can't be Gil, and even if it is— But she would just drive by, and then come back. Jane and Brook hadn't heard her.

She reached the village and turned back up the Cove road. It loomed ahead now, Gil's home, square and handsome, topped by its sturdy widow's walk. She slowed the car to a standstill before it, in the shadows. Heart pounding, she stared. Lights, sure enough, blazed from the small-paned windows. There was a car parked in the drive by the door.

AND SUDDENLY, as she watched, the door opened. In the flood of light a girl, slight and golden-haired, came down the steps, a girl in a blue dress and sweater. She was folowed by a child, a tiny tow-head. A little boy of about four.

"Go on back, Teddy." The girl turned. Her voice was low and soft and lovely. "Go on in. I'll just be a minute!"

The child turned obediently and trotted off, out of sight. The girl ducked into the car, and out again, and went up the steps, and the door slammed to behind her. A curtain went down.

But Candy had seen enough. It was Gil's wife. It must be. She was lovely. Even at such a distance, in the dusk, Candy could see that. Young and romantic, glamorous, even. And that, more than anything, sent a knife tearing through Candy's heart. She thought, I love him still! Oh, Gil! How can I? When you belong now to somebody as beautiful as that! But she did. To herself she could admit it.

She sat very still, white and shaken. Gil's wife. But it couldn't be his child. The boy was certainly three or more.

She thought, Maybe Gil sold the house. Maybe those two have nothing to do with Gil. I'm getting balmy.

But somehow she knew, some instinct told her. That was the girl named Phyllis. But where was Gil? Flying over the sea to Rio at this moment? Gil, who belonged to the sea and sky.

Suddenly Candy's heart turned over. She thought, I was a fool ever to try to stop him. She didn't, of course. She was used to flying. They had things in common. She was new and exciting, and I was just Candy, an old story. But shivering suddenly, she whispered, "Oh, Gil— Gil."

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She sat there for a little while, pulling herself together. Then she turned the roadster around and headed home. Jane and Brook would be waiting. And Fidelia, who was coming over from the village to cook for them. That was real. This was just a dream, fantastic, of no importance. Not in the serene, sensible future she would be living now as Brook's smart, sophisticated young wife.

But tomorrow—her breath caught—tomorrow she would have to find out about that tow-headed infant.

Back at the cottage on the dunes, she found everyone making merry in the kitchen. Helping Fidelia get dinner, Jane announced. Though what help they could be, after three martinis, Jane didn't know, she admitted frankly.

"It's nice to catch a wee glimpse of you again, though, angel!" she observed politely, waving her glass. "Was it a simply beautiful sunset? Or have you been renewing old friendships, perhaps? Don't tell me Gil is home. I thought I saw a light in his windows."

"Gil? Gil who? Should I get jealous?" Brook asked.

They were fools, but Candy rallied. She refused the drink Brook passed her and said, "No, you don't need to be jealous, Brook."

"Then you still love me? I'm getting warmer?"

She nodded, and turned away. It was awful what a few drinks could do on empty stomachs, to otherwise stainless characters like Jane and Brook. She didn't blame them.

She heard Jane saying now, "Don't tell me you didn't bring back some lobsters, or littlenecks, Candace. I simply can't make do with anything less than clam chowder tonight."

"There's chowder cooking right now," Fidelia stated tersely. "If you'll all just get out of the way, I'll dish it up. Shoo!"

SO THEY had their priceless chowder, and nothing more was said about Gil. They had blueberry pie from berries Fidelia had canned, and steaming coffee. Brook, in country clothes, beamed and looked nice and safe and contented, as a prospective husband ought to look! No temper in Brook. No restless thrist for adventure.

"Oh, stop it!" Candy raged to herself.

In the living room, later, they sat around the fire. Brook had done a marvelous job of getting the place livable. Soft light from the shaded oil lamps flickered on the braided rugs and deep, comfortable chairs, and from the portable radio, dinner music drifted insidious, lovely. She heard Brook saying suddenly, "Shall we dance, Miss Weatherbee? Or do you prefer brooding? You have a sort of touch-me-not air about you tonight. Everything Jake?"

"Of course. Oh, Brook, I'm sorry. I

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didn't mean to go into a brown study."

It was oddly comforting suddenly to feel his arm around her, to hear him saying, his lips against her cheek as they danced, "I missed you, dearest darling. Whatever were you doing, cruising around this god-forsaken region all by yourself? I'll worry, leaving you and Jane here alone when I go back tomorrow."

So he didn't love it. God-forsaken! She drew away, chilled. "But don't you think it's beautiful?" she demanded, eyes blazing.

"Well, maybe. Bleak and wild seem more the words to me. Reminds me of *Wuthering Heights*. Or could it be those martinis?"

Well, what did it matter? It wasn't fair to feel so angry with him. He hadn't had a chance to see the moors, the sapphire ponds, the sea, in all its sparkling summer glory. But, the fact remained, this was home to her, and Brook did not belong.

She let him kiss her good night though, and draw her close for a moment. "I'll be missing you sixty seconds every minute, baby," he told her. "So don't loiter up here too long. I'll be counting the days. And I'm hoping hard for that Christmas present."

"You mean me?" she whispered unsteadily.

"You, yes, my darling. "Even if it's just a quick sprint to City Hall."

It would be more than that, if she decided to give him the Christmas gift he meant. Brook's family would expect a magnificent show. St. Thomas', and a dozen bridesmaids. A huge reception out at Jane's Long Island home. Later, Brook's East Sixty-First Street apartment, complete with liveried doorman and a roof-garden overlooking Manhattan, until they could decide where they wished to build.

A far cry from the little white house by the harbor, where she could always smell the sea. A far cry from the dreams she used to have with Gil's hard young arms around her. But life was like that. She was learning. And all she could do was string along.

SHE SAID good-by to him in the morning, trying hard to smile and act natural. It was a glorious day, full Indian summer. Beyond the dunes, the sea was dazzling in its blueness. The surf crashed, and Jane exclaimed in delight, "I feel restored! Maybe we'll stay a month, darn it! That's what this place always does to me."

"And there," she added, sighing, as Brook's train disappeared down the bend, "goes one of God's noblemen, if ever there was one. Though a lot of good it will ever do him. You've got that fey look on your puss, my darling. Candy, tell me! Are you still carrying the spear for that harum-scarum Gil?"

There was never any fooling Jane. Candy gave up. She said, "There was a light in his windows last night. You were right, Jane. I drove by and saw his wife at the door. She looked beautiful."

"And you hate her!" Jane nodded. "I don't blame you."

"No. But I can't make it add up, Jane, about the child."

Jane couldn't, either. She said, "Let's ask Fidelia. She knows all the gossip around town."

So they asked Fidelia and she failed them. She confessed to being utterly in the dark. "Maybe, though," she said sagely, "she was married before. You'd thought of that? But nobody knows anything about Gil's marriage."

So that seemed to be that. They gave up speculating about it at last. Jane took her knitting and retired to the terrace where the sun was bright and warm.

"Socks for my honey," she explained, waving the scarlet wool. "His tastes are terrible. He likes them loud." She peered up at Candy, frowning over the rim of her pixie glasses. "I just hope you are as

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blissful as I am someday, darling. There's nothing that can beat a good, cozy marriage, with the right partner gazing absently at you over the morning paper. But it has to be the right one, mind you. So if you're not sure about Brook, for heaven's sake, hesitate!"

It was wonderful to be that happy and contented. It proved that it could happen. Candy wandered off, the old pain stabbing her heart. Jane was lucky. But not everyone was so favored.

Afterward she never knew exactly how it happened, or how she got through that day. But suddenly it was sunset time again and she was in the roadster, heading once more toward the harbor to watch the fishing fleet come in. Perhaps Joe would have heard something by now. That afternoon she had driven slowly by Gil's old home and had seen nothing. Even the car was gone. The place looked closed. But Joe might know. If he didn't, he would try and find out for her.

I'm crazy, shameless! she thought, her young face grim. It couldn't possibly matter now. It was a closed chapter.

But it wasn't. She knew that with every beat of her heart. In all her life Gil was the only one who could stir her to dreams and rapture. She had been his dream, too, for so long. He couldn't forget. As long as they lived, they would both remember and wonder—

She parked the car once again beneath the apple tree. She could hear the fleet coming in. She got out, a small, vivid figure in her old blue jeans and yellow jersey, her bright hair windblown and wild. She walked out onto the pier. And then, like a bolt from the blue, it happened. She heard a voice—a voice that turned her bones to water.

"Candy!" It was Gil.

HE WAS staring up at her from the deck of a quahogger. Joe's boat, with Joe lurking behind him. He looked just exactly the same. Old dungarees and a battle-gray sweat shirt, with the sun blazing on his bright, cropped hair. More than ever a Viking, thrilled, expectant.

For an instant she stared, struck dumb. Two years dropped away. It was Gil, and Candy, gay and happy, and passionately in love.

Then, finding her voice, she said, "Hello, Gil!" It sounded light and casual. "Whatever brought you home?"

"The same thing that brought you, maybe!" he retorted. "Isn't this week-end our anniversary?"

She choked, and pulled herself together. She heard him saying incredulously, "She looks just the same; not changed a bit, Joe, has she? Still the prettiest girl in two hemispheres! Red-headed and a vixen."

She clenched her hands. So he wanted to be bright and funny, did he? With that golden-headed wife back at the house! She said, "I don't know what you mean—an anniversary. Don't be silly."

He was beside her then, leaping from the boat. Six foot two, and built in proportion. He didn't touch her but his eyes blazed into hers. He said, "Candy, look! I have to see you. Joe didn't tell me until just now that you were home. Tonight?"

"No! She choked. "Of course not!"

"Why? Why not, darling?" he said in the old tender voice.

Darling! He had said it. She stared at him.

"You know why!" she blazed. "You're married, Gil. Joe told me. I saw your wife last night when I passed the house. We can't get back into yesterday, no matter what you think. That's just plain crazy." She choked and turned away. "Oh, go away, Gil! I don't want to see you!"

"Don't you?" His hands were suddenly on her shoulders, swinging her around. Very softly, he added, "Darling, how you lie. You want it as much as I do. I couldn't be mistaken about you. I know you—your eyes, your lips, your moods—everything

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about you, Candy. So don't talk back to me. Tonight? Around eight-thirty?"

"No!" She wrenched away from him.

"We'll go dancing. The juke box still plays *Diane*. I made a point of finding out. I'll camp on your doorstep, Candy."

She didn't wait to hear any more. Was he mad? He must be! She fled along the pier and started the roadster. This time she hit the apple tree. She backed away, the blood rioting through her veins. She heard them laughing, Gil and Joe. But it was a lovely sound. She hurtled up the dusty road and home.

She passed Jane on her way to her room and heard her cry, "Well, for Pete's sake! What's happened. Did you meet up with a ghost?"

"Yes. A ghost named Gil. Oh, Jane, he's back! And he's gone crazy. Or maybe I have!"

Jane said soulfully, "I'm putting my money on you."

In her room Candy collapsed, weak and wobbling. It hadn't happened. She wouldn't see him if he came. But he wouldn't. He must have been slap-happy!

"But he wasn't," she whispered. There had been a grim determination in his eyes. More than that, a heavenly eagerness.

WELL, he would tell her eveything. She thought, I'll see him, and find out the whole story. No harm in that! Then I can forget him, and go back to New York and marry Brook."

It was ridiculous, of course, but she dressed very carefully that evening. An off-shoulder white crepe blouse, and a floor-length skirt of soft green velvet. In the old days, they had gone dancing in any old thing! But now—

"You'll shock the village!" Jane said.

Suddenly it didn't matter. Nothing mattered but seeing him, hearing his voice again. Candy's heart, all once, took wings.

It was nearly nine when a car whirled up the drive, flashing its headlights, and Gil leaped up the steps and pounded on the door. Jane let him in, and gasped from his bear hug. He had always adored Jane.

"So you're married now, Jane!" he exclaimed. "Good for you. It becomes you."

"You, too, I might add," Jane murmured. "But I won't"

If he heard her, he paid no attention. He was looking at Candy, his eyes aflame. He seemed suddenly tongue-tied, entranced.

But at last they were out in the moonlight, in his car, heading into town. His shoulder touched hers and he was saying, "Candy! Tell me all about you. We've got a lot of things to get caught up on."

"Two years of things," she whispered breathlessly.

She let it go at that. She sat beside him, very small and still, watching the moonlit road unwind before them. How many times had they ridden, in companionable, blissful silence, like this.

She thought, her fingers clenched, you can get back into yesterday. Oh, yes, you can! Last night she hadn't thought so. But now she knew. It was as if the past two years had never happened. They were back together, and time stood still.

The Inn, when they drew up there, was crowded. But Gil wangled a table, as he always had. It was in a little booth, not too near the band. The moon made magic on the water, lapping against the patio outside. In the summer, they used to sit out there.

She heard Gil's voice. She heard the music. Gil was saying, "Its our song, Candy—*Diane*. I asked them to play it for you. Come on, darling, let's dance."

His hand was on hers, drawing her up. They went out on the floor together. The music swirled about them. She fitted her step to his. He drew her close, his cheek against her hair, and happiness blazed through her. Her fingers tightened in his. There had never been anything like this and, if she lived to be a hundred, there never would be.

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Suddenly she heard his voice. It was just a whisper, husky, shaken. He said, "Candy! Joe told me what he told you yesterday. He was right, but only partly so. Do you want to hear the rest or don't you really give a hoot now? Not that I'd blame you!"

She lifted startled eyes to his. "Of course!" she said. "I have to hear it, Gil. It's what I came back for."

"Good! Wonderful!" he said.

For a tiny minute she thought, I'm dreaming. She swallowed hard and braced herself. Whatever it was, they had had this evening, with Gil's eyes alight with the old bright, ardent flame.

They gathered up their things at the table. Gil dropped her wrap about her shoulders. He said, "Come on, let's go. We can talk better out under the stars."

THEY MADE their way through the crowd to the door. And there, abruptly, it happened. They nearly collided with two people coming in. A tall, dark man, square-shouldered, sturdy and a golden-headed girl in blue. The girl—Candy's heart lurched—that she had seen at the door at Gil's last night.

She heard Gil say, "Hello, Phyl! Jock!" His tone was light and casual. But his hand closed hard over her arm.

"Why, hello, darling! How funny!" The girl laughed and her glance swept over Candy. "You celebrating, too?"

There were introductions then, brief, indistinguishable, and a casual exchange of pleasantries. Then they were outside in the soft, warm moolight, and Gil was saying, "Come on, sweet, let's scram out of here."

It didn't make sense, not yet. Or did it? She looked at him as he headed the car toward the harbor. And suddenly she knew. Some sixth sense, woman's intuition told her. But she must wait until Gil told her.

So she sat beside him, breathless, her heart soaring. She thought, I can't believe it. But I know it's true! He's free again! Something happened. It didn't work out. And fate brought us both back tonight.

They drew up, at last, under the apple tree near the pier, and Gil said, shutting off the engine, "Candy, do you remember what we used to do on moonlit nights like this? With the bay and a boat waiting for us?"

"Yes! And Joe's boat is waiting," she whispered. "Oh, come on Gil, let's!"

Hand in hand they ran down the pier and Joe's boat was waiting. Gil leaped down and turned, holding his arms up for her. He caught her close, and swung her down, and held her for a breathless moment. She could feel the wild pounding of his heart against hers.

Then he let her go and turned to start the engine. It coughed and sputtered for an instant and she held her breath. Then it caught hold and he laughed exultantly.

Love's Promises

Love's promises are fragile things,
That any wind might blow away,
But man and maid still whisper them,
And live to rue the day!

—Catherine E. Berry

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He guided them through the creek out into the wide shining waters of the harbor, straight into the path of the moon. They felt the salt spray on their cheeks, the deck rocking beneath them. And Gil's hand closed hard over hers.

"This is where we belong," he said. "Right, darling?"

"Oh, yes!" she whispered, pressing close to him. "Is it better than flying, Gil?" She held her breath.

"No. But different." He looked down at her and in the moonlight, his sea-blue eyes were so bright. "I'll have to fly sometimes —always, Candy. But I'm coming back to go fishing with Joe. Did you guess that?"

"No. But I think it's wonderful."

He turned to her then. He made a stifled sound and caught her close. He whispered, "Candy! Do you love me still? I've never stopped loving you, wanting you, darling! Does that sound crazy?"

"No!" It was just a whisper against his lips.

"You don't hate me?"

"No. Why should I? Oh, Gil!" She broke away from him. With the sea plunging all around them, she said, breathless, "I love you. Oh, yes, Gil! I've never stopped. But you'd better tell me the story now, don't you think so? I'm engaged to someone else. And you're married! Joe said you were. And yesterday I saw her coming out of your house."

The words trailed away. Gil's hands were on her shoulders. "But you can't marry anyone else. Not now!" he blazed. "Do you love him? If you say you do, you're lying."

"Yes, I'm lying." She hid her face against his chest. "Oh, Gil!" She was very still for a moment. With his arms around her she was safe, where she belonged. Then she lifted her face and said, "Tell me about Phyllis and that little boy. He's not yours—"

"No! Of course not. Phyl was married before."

"But you did marry her?"

"Yes. And it lasted a couple of minutes!"

She drew away and stared up at him. In the moonlight his young face was grim, scornful. She said, "Tell me, Gil!"

SO HE told her then. He turned back to the wheel and didn't look at her as he told her. She stood beside him, close, listening.

"She was a stewardess on the airliner I was flying," he said. "I told you that. Her husband was killed on VJ day. I was sorry for her because she seemed so young and despairing, Candy. I took her around a little when we made stops, here and there. Dinner, a dance or two, just to cheer her up a little. She showed me pictures of her husband and the baby. She got to depend on me. I didn't realize what was happening."

Candy's heart contracted. "You dope!"

"I know. I'm a fall guy for helpless humanity." He squeezed her hand. "But I was in love with you, and I was so blazing mad when you found that fool letter she wrote, and jumped to conclusions!"

"But why didn't you explain it?"

"I couldn't. Not when you looked at me as if I'd committed all the sins in the alphabet! You made me see red—"

A couple of idiotic hotheads! Candy held her breath.

"But you could have stopped short of marrying her," she managed at last. "You need a keeper."

"I know." He flung her a rueful grin. "That's what she says. We knew it was a mistake as soon as it happened. It never would have happened if I hadn't got tight one night. I was mad at you, and she was there and it seemed a fine idea, at the moment. But—"

In the little silence, Candy said a breathless prayer. Poor Gil! And poor me! she thought, suddenly outraged.

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She said grimly, "Tell me the rest, and hurry. You did marry her, and it didn't work. And now—"

"She's married to the gentleman she was with this evening. Didn't you listen when I introduced you?" he said, frankly amazed.

"I never catch names at introductions, and you know it!" she retorted helplessly.

IT WAS funny that she could feel so gay and blithe about it, after all the months of agony. But that was love, maybe. Forgiving and forgetting. There was just one thing more, though, that she had to know.

She said, "But she was at your house last night!" Her voice was puzzled. "Why, Gil?"

"Because it's her house now," he said cheerfully. "I gave it to her as a wedding present. She loves old houses like that, and it doesn't mean anything to me now." He grinned suddenly, and looked mysterious. "Because I've got another. The Eldredge house down here by the harbor. Remember?"

"Oh!" She stared at him. "The one I always loved so?"

"None other, darling!" He turned suddenly and caught her close. His lips came down on hers. He said, "But do we have to talk and talk forever, for heaven's sake? Let's call it a day, baby! Joe told me what I wanted to know. You know what?"

"No, what?" But she did know.

"That he thought I still had a chance with you. I trust Joe," he said. "So I grabbed the house. It's been up for sale for a month, he told he. And now will you live there with me, darling, and be my wife? I'll stop flying, if you want, except just now and then. You listening?"

"Oh, Gil!" She flung her arms around him. "You fool!" He would never stop flying. He couldn't. But she wouldn't worry any more. She had learned her lesson. "Tell me more."

Instead, he set his lips to hers and kissed her. A kiss that rocked the world. Against her heart she could feel his heart thudding, strong and steady. She thought, tomorrow, maybe, I'll think about Brook. But he'll survive. And I can't, not without Gil.

Gil let her go at last, with a start. The boat was plunging. He snatched the wheel and straightened it out. But his arm was around her, holding her close against him. He said dreamily, "Shall we keep on going, straight to the moon?"

"Yes. Anywhere! So long as you take me.

"I'll take you!" he declared.

Above them the stars danced. The far-flung waters of the bay tossed and shimmered in the moonlight. The little boat streaked on. They were where they belonged, she and Gil together!

Candy whispered, "Oh, darling, isn't it a lovely, lovely world!"

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The Preying Heart

By Velda Johnston

Joan knew her life was in danger as long as she was near Rick—but her love for him was greater than her fear.

Conclusion

ON A COLD November evening, *Joan Ordway* walked along a solitary path in Central Park to her rendezvous with a man who called himself *Smith*. Under her arms she carried a package containing five thousand dollars, practically the last of her inheritance. Smith, bundled in a high-collared overcoat which obscured his face, handed her four love letters which her immature, idolizing sister, *Bonnie*, had written to a middle-aged actor, already married. Suddenly Smith pulled her toward him, his hand turning her face upward, and placed his lips

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Her voice was no longer cool, but sick, trembling. "Don't ever touch me again. Can't you see I loathe you?"

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against hers. Angry, she fought against him and tore herself away; in her clenched hand she held a triangular button, torn from the blackmailer's coat.

Joan returned home to find *Cousin Hattie* and her son, *Gerald*, waiting. They wanted to borrow some money, and when Joan told them she had none, she could see the disbelief in their eyes. No matter what she said, people refused to believe that her father's fortune was gone—except for this house and a summer home on Long Island.

That night, at a party, Joan found her fiancé, *Scott Eldridge*, kissing another girl. It was not a surprise; she had felt for some time that he had changed. Quietly, she broke their engagement. As she was leaving the party, *Rick Ainsley*, whom she had met briefly a few weeks ago, suggested they have dinner together. Gratefully she accepted; she did not want to be alone with her unpleasant thoughts.

Their date was the beginning of a new and exciting period in Joan's life. For two weeks they spent every available moment together—and then Rick proposed. Despite the fact that Cousin Hattie and Bonnie disapproved violently, Joan accepted. They had a quiet ceremony, and left immediately afterward to spend their honeymoon in the mountains.

And it was that night that Joan's dreams came crashing about her head. Because, before they reached their destination, Joan discovered the button that she'd torn from the blackmailer's coat matched a missing one on her new husband's coat. Frantic with some inexplicable terror, she escaped from the unsuspecting Rick when he stopped for gasoline. She hitched a ride back to New York.

At home she found Bonnie still awake. Her sister's guilty expression confirmed her suspicions. In tears, Bonnie admitted that she had met Rick weeks before Joan; and that they had conspired to blackmail the money from Joan. Bonnie had wanted the money for a new mink coat; and, in return, Rick was to receive a ring that once belonged to Grandfather Ordway—a ring which supposedly had directions for the location of a gold mine he had discovered in his youth.

Just as Bonnie finished her story, the doorbell rang. It was Rick. Numbly, Joan listened to what he had to say. That he had honestly believed she had plenty of money and was not being fair to Bonnie, that he had intended telling her the whole story on their honeymoon, and lastly, that he loved her very much. But Joan, hurt and heartsick, ordered him to leave. And as the door shut behind him, she knew that despite everything he had done, she loved him more than she would ever love again.

Now go on with the story:

MOUNTING THE STAIRS, she entered her big bedroom with its cool green rug and maple furniture, and crossed to the mirrored dressing table. Pulling out the long center drawer, she opened a satin-quilted box and rummaged among mis-matched earrings, necklaces with broken clasps, and two charm bracelets she'd been very fond of during her teens. Yes, there was Grandpa's ring. She turned it between her thumb and forefinger, looking at the wide silver band, at the soapstone setting, almost as big as a quarter, with its carved Gay-Ninety version of a Grecian nymph, drapery concealing most of her ample charms. Then, picking up a nail file, Joan pried back the prongs that held the stone in place.

The stone fell with a clatter to the glass table top. The silver backing which the stone had concealed was without engraving of any sort. She swept the ring and the loose setting into the jewelry box, closed the drawer.

For a moment she stared at her white, tense reflection in the mirror. Suddenly she felt a need to get away from this house, away from Bonnie, away from the memory of the past two weeks. She would spend the night in the old Ordway house on Long Island, as she often had when she was upset or unhappy. The third-floor tower room where she had slept as a child would be fresh and clean. A woman from the nearby village aired the third-floor every two weeks and put fresh linen in the tower room in readiness for Joan's frequent visits.

She hauled an overnight bag down from the closet shelf and packed a few things. Then, carrying the suitcase, she descended the stairs and walked back along the hall. Bonnie stood just outside the study door, her small face apprehen-

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sive. "Joan, what are you going to do?"

Joan pushed the door open to the butler's pantry, switched on the light. "I'm going out to Long Island for the night."

While Bonnie watched from the doorway, Joan pulled open a cupboard drawer and took out a pocket-sized flashlight. Bonnie said, "Please, Joan, let me go with you. I'm—scared."

Joan turned, her face softening a little as she saw the hang-dog, anxious look in the younger girl's eyes. "Don't be. Just keep the doors locked until Cousin Hattie arrives. If Rick Ainsley comes back, don't let him in. If he phones, tell him I'm not here. Don't say where I've gone. Just say I'm not here. Understand?"

Bonnie nodded earnestly. "I understand."

An hour and a half later, the taxi Joan had hired in the once-fashionable town of South Beach turned onto the broad drive that led to the old Ordway mansion. To other eyes, the house might have looked like a cover illustration for a book of ghost stories. The once-smooth lawn was tangled and unkempt; the giant oaks and maples were badly in need of pruning. Above the first two floors, the windows boarded up against the depredations of prowlers and rock-throwing small boys, the house sprouted a fantastic array of cupolas, balconies, and other Victorian grotesqueries. But Joan had known and loved this house too long to find it anything but friendly, even in the middle of the night.

The taxi drew up before the broad wooden steps. She said, placing bills in the driver's hand, "Then someone will pick me up in time to catch the ten o'clock train to New York tomorrow morning?"

"I'll leave word at the office."

While the sound of the taxi's motor dwindled away down the drive, she crossed the veranda and, holding the flashlight in her left hand, fitted a key into the stout Yale lock. The door swung back onto cold air that smelled of dust and mildew.

Stepping inside, she locked and bolted the door, and then played the flashlight's beam over the closed sliding doors at the left side of the hall. Behind those doors, she knew, were a few sticks of furniture and tattered velvet drapes, all that was left of the drawing room's former elegance. The flashlight's beam swept over the foot of the stairs to a golden oak table which, bearing an old-fashioned oil lamp, stood against the right wall. She removed the lamp chimney and applied a match to the wick.

Her own giant shadow accompanied her as she climbed the stairs, the suitcase in one hand and the lamp held high in the other. She passed the closed doors on the second floor, moved up the flight of stairs to the top floor, and walked over the ragged hall carpet toward the tower room.

SUDDENLY she stopped short. At the end of the corridor which, branching off the main hall, ran toward the rear of the house, a door stood open, the door to the room where Grandpa Ordway had died. Feeble light came from the doorway, and a faint chipping sound, like metal against stone.

She turned toward that rectangle of light, neither remembering or noticing that the side corridor was not carpeted. The click of her high heels was loud in the stillness. Instantly the chipping sound stopped. She ran the rest of the way and then halted in the doorway, the lamp held high.

There was movement at the window—the swift withdrawal of a dark-sleeved arm, the falling into place of the cracked yellow blind. She heard the clatter of footsteps across the porch and down the outside stairs which Grandpa Ordway had added to the house a year before his death.

She stood motionless for a moment.

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No point in dashing to the window. By now the intruder would be lost in the shadows below. She placed the oil lamp on the mantel of ugly glazed tile and set down her suitcase. Crossing to the window, she pulled the blind aside. Because the outside staircase made it accessible, this window, like those on the first two floors, had been boarded up, but someone had pried the boards loose and smashed the glass. Fragments of glass lay on the sill and on the floor beneath the window.

Letting the blind fall into place, she turned and walked back toward the fireplace. Evidently the intruder had taken with him his flashlight, or electric lantern, or whatever he'd had, because now only the yellow light of the oil lamp lay over the bare floor, and the dismanteled bed stacked in one corner. Some sneak thief, she thought. Well, he must have found pickings lean. Long ago, all furnishings of value had been sold or moved to the New York house.

Suddenly she paused. That chipping noise. What on earth had he been doing?

Her gaze swept the room, found the little crumbs of plaster on the hearth. Swiftly her eyes lifted to the mantel of hollow glazed tile and fastened her gaze on the tile second from the left corner. Nearly all the plaster had been dug out from around it. In another moment or two the intruder would have been able to lift it out.

Her pulse suddenly heavy and rapid, she moved to the fireplace, took her nail file from her purse, and set to work. Only a minute or so passed before she lifted the tile from its place. Something dropped from the hollow exterior, struck the floor, rolled. She stopped the object with her foot, then bent and picked it up. It was the duplicate of the ring in her dressing table.

Slowly she set the hollow tile on the mantel. She stood staring down at the ring, recalling once more the night Grandpa Ordway died. The massive black walnut bed had stood opposite the fireplace that night. That was why he had pointed straight ahead and said urgently, "Look there! Right there!" Evidently he had realized that death was near, and so he had made a last, frantic effort to reveal a secret which, for some reason, he had hesitated to divulge until then.

But that meant that the intruder who had fled from this room a few minutes ago was no casual housebreaker. He was someone who knew of the ring's existence and its value. How had he known which particular tile to pry loose? Well, maybe some irregularity in the color or thickness of the plaster surrounding it had set him on the right track.

Nervously she glanced across the shadowy room to the window. The blind remained motionless. She picked up the nail file and began to pry the big setting loose from the ring. In a few seconds the stone with its carved figure lay in the palm of her hand.

She held the ring close to the oil lamp. Something was engraved on the silver backing, figures so small she could scarcely read them. Was that first letter an "r?" Yes, an "r", then an "l", then three more "r's", then the figure "2"—

SOMEONE WAS moving down the hall with swift, quiet strides. Clutching the ring and its loose setting in her hand, she looked wildly around for some kind of weapon. Her hand thrust into the pocket of her coat, came out with the flashlight. It was ridiculously inadequate, but it was all she had.

Rick appeared in the doorway, looming tall in the yellow light, his face set, haggard. After a moment she slowly lowered the flashlight.

She said, her voice over-loud in the stillness, "What are you doing here?"

"I telephoned your sister. She wouldn't

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tell me where you'd gone, but I remembered your saying that you often came here when you were troubled or unhappy. So I drove out here. I turned into the drive just as your taxi left."

She said, trying to keep her fear of him out of her voice, "How did you get in?"

"I knew you'd never answer the doorbell, not when you were alone here at this time of night, so I drove around to the rear of the house. A couple of boards on one of the windows there have been pried up. I managed to loosen a few more and climb inside. Then I started to look for you."

No, she thought, that isn't true. You were here before I arrived. You were digging out the plaster from around the fireplace tile. But there would be no point in charging him with that. He'd only deny it.

She said, "Why did you come here?"

He took a step toward her. She held her ground but her hand tightened around the flashlight. "To show you this," he said.

After a moment she lowered her gaze from his face to the big ring on his outstretched palm. She said slowly, "Why, it's the same as—"

"Yes, it looks just like old Ulysses Ordway's ring—or rather, rings. I knew you'd never believe my story until I had this ring to show you, so I went to my place and got it."

He glanced at the fireplace, and his blue eyes grew suddenly intent, as if he were noticing for the first time the gaping hole left by the tile she had removed. "You were looking for old Ulysses' ring! Did you find it?"

Her fingers tightened around the ring and its loose setting. Then she realized that it would be futile to try to conceal it from him. If he chose, he could twist her wrist and take the ring in a second.

She opened her hand, held out the ring with its loose stone. He said, making no move to touch it, "So you've seen the engraving. Now look at this."

Evidently the setting of the ring he held was already loose, because as soon as he bent back one of the prongs which held it the big stone fell into his cupped palm. He held the ring up to the oil lamp. Reluctantly she moved closer and looked at the silver backing. The same "r's" and "l's", interspersed with numbers—

She said wonderingly, "Why, the engraving's just the same!"

"Not exactly. This ring and the one you found tonight give the directions for reaching a vein of gold-bearing ore in a canyon off the upper Colorado River. But each ring gives only half the directions. One ring without the other is useless for directions."

The silence lengthened. After a moment she looked down, afraid that he

How Santa Claus found out...
THERE'S NOTHING QUITE LIKE ALKA-SELTZER FOR RELIEVING THE MISERIES OF A COLD
I DON'T FEEL LIKE BEING SANTA CLAUS — THIS COLD'S MAKING ME MISERABLE!
OH, DON'T DISAPPOINT THEM! ALKA-SELTZER WILL REALLY BRING YOU FAST RELIEF!
MERRY CHRISTMAS! THERE'S NOTHING QUITE LIKE ALKA-SELTZER FOR RELIEVING THE MISERIES OF A COLD!
Alka-Seltzer
AT ALL DRUG STORES

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would read her thoughts in her eyes. He could kill her now. He could strike her with that tile on the mantelpiece, take both rings, and leave. No one would hear her scream, or hear the blow.

No, he wouldn't do that. In the first place, he was surely intelligent enough to realize that as soon as Bonnie told the police that he had been looking for her tonight, they would start tracking him down. In the second place, murder required a different type of personality than that of the blackmailer and thief, a personality more direct and violent, less wily and devious.

He put his hand on her arm. "Let's go over to the window and sit down while we talk." She jerked away from his, and his face tightened. "All right, I won't touch you. But let's sit down."

SHE FOLLOWED him over to the deep curving embrasure before the dormer windows. Taking a handkerchief from his pocket he rubbed it over the window seat, looking dryly at the dust covered linen, and dropped the handkerchief to the floor. She settled herself in one corner of the broad seat and he sat in the other, his yellow hair gleaming in the lamplight, his face half in shadow.

He said, "Did you ever hear your grandfather speak of Jim Ainsley?"

She said, her voice cool with disbelief, "Never. Who was he?"

"My grandfather. He and your grandfather Ordway were boyhood friends. They were raised on adjoining farms near Newlin, Massachusetts."

That might be true. Grandpa Ordway had been born near Newlin.

"They were practically inseparable until their early twenties," Rick went on. "Then they both fell in love with Helen Brock, the girl who became my grandmother. Maybe it started out as friendly rivalry, but after awhile it became bitter, deadly. Helen eventually decided to marry Jim Ainsley. But that was just about the last time Jim won out over Ulysses Ordway. From then on Ulysses' fortunes went steadily up, and Jim's steadily down. A railroad bought part of the farm your grandfather had inherited, and with that money, he bought a knitting mill and started making profits hand over fist. In the meantime, the Ainsley farm was having about all the bad luck a farm could have—crop failures, sick cattle, and all the rest of it. Finally Jim and his wife went out to Arizona. Jim tried ranching and failed, tried newspaper editing and failed, tried prospecting and nearly died of hunger and thirst without finding a trace of pay dirt. Finally his elder brother died, leaving the farm to him, so he and his wife and their son, my father, came back to Massachusetts.

"Ulysses Ordway was well on his way to his first million by then, so I guess he felt he could afford to be magnanimous about Jim marrying Helen Brock. Anyway, they became friendly again, and Ulysses offered to pay all expenses on a several months' trip west if Jim would act as guide. Jim agreed, and they went out to Arizona, moving from town to town. Somewhere along the line they bought these rings, which I suppose were pretty hot stuff in those days.

"Then, in a little town named Shorthorn, Jim quarreled over cards with a local rancher. That night in a dark alley, the rancher tried to ambush Jim, but Jim saw him in time, beat him to the draw and killed him.

"Jim and Ulysses beat it out of town that very night. Sure, it was self-defense, but Ulysses was Jim's only witness, and both of them were strangers, whereas the rancher had been a local bigshot. Jim wouldn't have had a chance before a jury, even if the town had bothered to give him a trial.

"A few towns farther on, Jim and Ulysses decided to take a boat down the

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Colorado until the rapids made it unnavigable, and then explore some of the network of canyons that branch off the Colorado gorge. The country around there is—well, you must have seen how the cracks in a dry mudhole run in every direction. Millions of years of erosion and earthquakes have done the same thing to parts of the Southwest. Even today many of those branching canyons are unexplored. In those days, around the turn of the century, when Jim and Ulysses were both under thirty, that country had scarcely been touched."

ODD, JOAN thought fleetingly, to think of Grandpa Ordway, with his stooped shoulders and massive iron-gray head, as ever having been a young man.

"So they took a raft to a point on the river named Navajo Landing," Rick went on, "and then set out on foot through the twisting canyons. Each time they came to a place where the canyon divided they wrote down whether they took the left or right branch. If there were more than two branches, they wrote down the number of the branch they took, counting from the left. Otherwise they might have had a hard time finding their way back to the river.

"After awhile they encountered a stream. At first it was underground most of the time, appearing on the surface only for short stretches, the way rivers often do in that country. But after awhile the stream became good-sized, and finally they came to a roaring falls. They took a canyon that branched off to the right, and that night camped under three pinacles of rock which, my grandfather said, looked like the spires of a cathedral.

"In the morning Jim spotted what looked like gold-bearing ore high up on the canyon wall opposite. They climbed up there. The vein was right on the surface, and just by looking at it my grandfather could tell that it was rich enough to justify piping water up from the Colorado, in case the water in the canyon wasn't enough to work the vein. They dug out ore samples, and started back to the Colorado.

"On the way they started quarreling. My grandfather was always a little vague about that part of it, but I suspect that the basis of the quarrel was that old bitter rivalry over my grandmother. Anyway, by the time they reached Navajo Landing, they hated and distrusted each other so much that they had doped out a method by which neither of them could find his way back to the ore without the other. They split the sheet of paper on which they had recorded their journey, Ulysses keeping the first half and Jim the second. A boat picked them up and took them to the nearest town. There each man had his half of the directions engraved on his ring—"r" for right-hand canyon, "l" for left, and numerals wherever there had been more than two branching canyons. Then they went to the assay office. Just as Jim had hoped, the ore assayed as high as the Mother Lode in California.

"They took a train back to Massachusetts, so that Ulysses could get his affairs in order before they both returned to work the mine. On the train their quarrel broke out more bitterly than ever. Finally Ulysses turned to Jim and drawled, 'I think I'll just keep my ring as a souvenir. I'm rich enough right now. I don't need a gold mine.'

"Jim was frantic. His find would be useless if Ulysses withheld his half of the directions. He spoke of going to court to force Ulysses to keep his part of the bargain. Ulysses said, 'You do, and I'll wire the Arizona authorities that I saw you kill that man in Shorthorn, kill him in cold blood. I was the only witness, remember. And I'm going to leave a sealed note with my lawyer, telling about the Shorthorn murder, to be opened in case I'm found in an alley with a bullet in my back.'

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"Well, that's about all the story. Ulysses married, got richer, moved to New York, bought this mansion and the one in town, sent his sons to Groton and Harvard. Jim Ainsley's son, my father, quit high school to go to work, but he managed to study nights and get his accounting degree. He moved to New York, married, and rented a flat on the west side. After awhile Jim Ainsley, a widower by that time, moved in with them. That was the flat I grew up in.

"You'd have thought that old Ulysses might have relented after a time, or at least stopped feeling vengeful. But evidently not. He even sent a dupliate of his ring to that exhibit, and then mailed the exhibit catalogue to my grandfather. No one in my family knew it was a duplicate, of course. Even I didn't until Bonnie gave it to me a couple of weeks ago. Maybe Ulysses hoped that Jim would try to steal it from the exhibit and get caught."

Rick's handsome face hardened. "My grandfather died a few months after that. It wasn't a pleasant death, and if he'd had x-rays taken in time it might have been prevented, but there wasn't much money in my family for x-rays and doctors. Within the next few years both my father and mother died. It was called heart disease in one case and pneumonia in the other, but both death certificates should have read too much work and too little money."

HE PAUSED. Feeling a little sick, Joan thought of the four people in that crowded flat, of the poverty made all the more bitter by the knowledge that only one man's vengefulness stood between them and a wholly different life.

"I worked my way through college," Rick went on, "got a commission during the war, and then landed this advertising job. There are some well-heeled guys in my office, and through them I began to get asked to receptions and big parties. Once in awhile I saw one or the other of the Ordway girls at a large party. Your sister looked pretty, silly, and spoiled. You looked cool, beautiful—and spoiled. I didn't actually hate either of you, but I had no reason to like you. And of course I didn't know that that poised, proud look of yours hid a lot of worries. How could I know? You still lived on Sixty-Third Street, dressed beautifully, and went around with rich people. As far as I could tell, the Ordways were still rolling in it.

"I thought of approaching you about the ring. But how did I know you'd even believe me? And if you did, you might have been as stubborn and selfish about it as your grandfather had been, especially if he'd filled you full of lies about Jim Ainsley's being a murderer.

"Then I met Bonnie at a party one day when she'd had too many champagne cocktails, and she babbled on about the man who'd returned her letters, and about a mink coat you were too stingy to buy for her. When the blackmail idea hit me, it seemed a good joke, and no more than what the Ordways deserved, considering what old Ulysses had done to the Ainsleys. Later, if the gold business panned out, I was going to give you your half. Probably you won't believe that now, but it's true.

"And then I met you, and fell in love with you. It was a cinch that if I told you I was the man you'd met in Central Park that night I'd lose you. It seemed to me that my only chance of holding you was to marry you, wait for awhile, and then tell you."

She looked through that uncertain light at his tense, set face. She couldn't help but believe his story, at least partially, since there were the two rings to back it up. And she could believe that Ulysses Ordway had been quite capable of carrying a grudge for a lifetime—stubborn old Ulysses, who used to boast that he never forgot a slight nor forgave an enemy.

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Almost, for one delicious, yielding moment, she could believe that Rick had married her only because he loved her and was desperately afraid of losing her.

And then she remembered that, no matter what the truth of the rest of his story, he had lied to her at least twice tonight. He had lied about listening outside the study doors of the Sixty-Third Street house. And he had lied about arriving at this house after she did. He had been here earlier, in this very room, trying to loosen the tile from the fireplace.

She said coldly, "You married me to get the ring, and for no other reason. Maybe, once you had it, you'd have shared the gold with me. Maybe you'd have made it necessary for me to divorce you before you went to look for the gold. I don't know. But I do know that you married me for the ring."

A muscle stood out like a cord along his jaw line. "Joan, for God's sake—"

She cut in crisply, "Do you think that the ore is still undiscovered?"

AFTER a long moment he said, "I'm sure of it. While my grandfather was alive, he kept track of new discoveries. Since his death I've kept up with the mining journals. There have been no big strikes in that region."

"Then we'll go there and claim it," she said in that same cold, even voice. "You could use the money, and so could Bonnie and I. Perhaps you could arrange for the equipment we'll need, and for a boat to take us to Indian Landing."

He was watching her closely. "Navajo Landing," he corrected. "Yes, I can arrange all that."

"Then we'll leave as soon as possible. I'll get an annulment when we return to New York. That way the few people who know we are married will just think we've changed our minds and decided to go out West for our honeymoon. Besides, the sooner we leave, the better. Bonnie is talkative. If we give her too much time to talk, we may find a swarm of gold-seekers waiting for us at Navajo Landing."

His hand reached out, closed tightly around hers. "Isn't there anyway I can convince you that the damned ore doesn't matter now, not the way you matter?"

She jerked her hand away. Her voice was no longer cool, but sick, trembling. "Don't ever touch me again," she said. "Can't you see I loathe you?" She stood up. "If your grandfather was anything like you, I can see why Grandpa Ordway hated him."

She saw his face whiten, saw his eyes turn so dark they almost looked black. He got to his feet. "I'll get busy on long distance tomorrow," he said evenly, "and make the arrangements. Shall I phone you in the afternoon?"

She had regained control of her voice. "Yes, I'll be back in New York at noon." She paused. "I'd better go down with you and unlock the front door."

His voice was as remote as her own. "Don't bother. I can go out the way I came in."

She watched him walk out the door, listened to the sound of his footsteps dwindling away down the long flight of stairs. After awhile, straining her ears, she heard his car start up, move away. Then the silence of the old house closed in. Feeling lonelier than ever before in her life, she picked up the oil lamp and the suitcase, walked to the room where she had slept as a child, and bolted the door behind her.

Shortly before noon the next day she climbed the stairs of the Sixty-Third Street house. As she neared her room, a door down the hall opened, and Cousin Hattie, wearing a net over her shingled gray hair, poked her head out. "Joan! I've got to talk to you."

Clutching her navy-blue dressing gown around her, Cousin Hattie swept down the hall. Resignedly Joan stood aside

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while the older woman entered the bedroom and settled herself on the chaise lounge.

"I've had the most awful night!" Cousin Hattie said. "I came here because, as I told you, I didn't think Bonnie should be left alone the first night you were away. And then I learned you weren't on your honeymoon at all! Bonnie, the poor, bewildered little thing, said you'd come home alone, and then rushed off to the Long Island house. She wouldn't tell me what it was all about. She said you might not want her to. And when I got up this morning she was gone. She just left a note saying she had an early luncheon date."

Joan sat down on the bed. Better to tell the whole story. Otherwise Cousin Hattie would question Bonnie until she extracted a highly garbled version of the whole affair.

BRIEFLY but explicitly, Joan told the story. Bonnie's letters. The five thousand dollars. The history of the two rings, and her decision to go out West with Rick to claim the discovery Ulysses Ordway and Jim Ainsley had made nearly half a century ago.

Cousin Hattie had been gasping horrified well-I-never's throughout the recital. Now she said vigorously, "Joan, that man is no better than a common thief!"

Although Joan had expressed the same opinion, now she felt a perverse desire to defend Rick. "It seems to me that Grandpa Ordway wasn't exactly honorable in the affair."

Cousin Hattie waved the remark away. "That's beside the point. The point is, are you actually going off alone with that man?"

Joan hesitated. Vaguely she had pictured Rick and herself threading through the dry canyons with some sort of guide. Now she realized that you don't take a guide along on such an expedition, not unless you want gold-seekers swarming around your claim before you even start to work it. She said doubtfully, "Well, I don't know—"

"Joan, you can't go off alone with a man like that to some God-forsaken spot. It would be dangerous. And since you're going to have the marriage annuled later, it wouldn't look right. I'm going with you."

"But it's apt to be a very rough trip and—"

"And I'm not exactly young. Is that what you mean? Very well, my dear, but who beat you three straight sets at tennis two summers ago?"

Joan smiled a wry acknowledgement. Cousin Hattie's forecourt play was nothing short of deadly. "All right. Have it your way."

Cousin Hattie stood up. "Now that's settled," she said briskly. "I'd better get dressed."

As soon as the older woman had left the room, Joan unlocked her overnight bag and unpacked it. She had just restored the empty suitcase to the closet shelf when she heard the downstairs door bell ring.

Swiftly she went down the stairs, opened the door. Scott Landreth stood on the doorstep, his chestnut hair glossy in the midday sunlight, an uncertain smile on his handsome mouth. He had dropped so completely from her thoughts these past few weeks that for a ludicrous second, she couldn't recall his name. Then she said, "Why, Scott! Come in."

He followed her into the drawing room. "You'll have a drink?" she asked.

"Too early in the day, thanks." He hesitated, and then said with a rush, "I met Bonnie just as I was coming out of the Plaza a few minutes ago."

Joan grew tense. "Yes?"

"She told me that you'd gone off on a honeymoon with some guy named Rick Ainsley, and then came home alone a few

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hours later. I didn't even know you were married."

"It all happened very suddenly."

He looked at her, his square, handsome face puzzled and disturbed. "What the devil is it all about?"

SHE HESITATED. Scott was not only her ex-fiancé, but her friend since childhood as well. He had a right to know at least part of the story. "I married a man I scarcely knew," she said, "and it turned out to be an even greater mistake than such marriages usually are. I'm going to get an annulment. Before I do, though, I'm going with him to a place on the Colorado River named Navajo Landing. Rick's grandfather was with Grandpa Ordway when he discovered gold ore, and Rick and I have the directions for finding it."

Scott said incredulously, "You mean that the gold strike wasn't just one of the old man's pipe dream, the way you always thought?"

"That's exactly what I mean."

He looked at her, hazel eyes narrowed. "Joan, there's a lot about this you haven't told me."

"Yes, but I've told you the main facts. This is to be kept strictly confidential, of course."

"Yes, I can see why." He turned, looked for a moment through the damask-draped windows at the sunlit street. Then he turned and faced her. "Joan, if you're going to get an annulment, will you give me another chance?"

She said, with mingled bitterness and wry amusement, "That gold ore makes me awfully popular. One man married me because of it, and now another man wants to. Aren't you being rather hasty, though? The gold may not amount to much. My impression is that a vein has to be extensive as well as rich to really pay off."

His face flushed. "Damn it, Joan, you have no right to talk to me like that! You know you've always meant more to me than any other girl. It was just that—"

"It was just that you wished I were rich instead of so darned fascinating."

"All right!" he said defiantly. "There's no point in being a romantic fool about it. Money is important. Two people couldn't live on what I make, and have any fun."

For the first time Joan noticed that Scott, despite his twenty-six years and his six feet of very masculine handsomeness, looked amazingly like Bonnie. The same spoiled, frankly greedy expression, the same petulant, immature look around the mouth.

"Maybe I'm a romantic," Joan said quietly. "All I know is that I want to be wanted just for myself. If this gold ore turns out to be worth a great deal, I'm going to marry a man so much richer than me that I can be sure my money doesn't

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matter. Or somehow, someway, I'll find a man who won't know I'm rich until after he's fallen in love with me." She paused. "I don't want to seem inhospitable, Scott, but I have things to do."

His voice was dignified, but his mouth still had that sulky, small-boy look. "All right," he said. "I'll leave."

When she had closed the door behind him, she just stood there for a moment, her hand on the knob. Then the telephone shrilled. As she walked back to the little telephone alcove beneath the stairs, she knew it was Rick's voice she would hear, and she remembered with a twisting sense of loss how, for two weeks, that knowledge had held the power to make her pulses race.

She lifted the phone. "Hello."

Rick's voice was coolly remote, as it had been just before he left her the night before. "I've arranged everything. We fly out there day after tomorrow. A raft will take us and our equipment to Navajo Landing. Is that satisfactory?"

Her voice was as coolly controlled as his. "Perfectly satisfactory."

THE LIGHT, motor-driven raft cut slowly across the turbulent brown river, jarred against the sandy beach in the shadow of the red cliff. Dave Cutler, the lean, sun-browned man who brought them down the river from Tehachi, the nearest town, stepped ashore and wrapped the mooring line around a slender-trunked willow. Returning to the raft, he led the meek, heavily-laden brown burro ashore, where it stood motionless, head drooping. Cousin Hattie stepped ashore next. In high boots, breeches, and a leather jacket, she displayed a tendency toward middle-aged spread, but otherwise looked as fit as an athletic college girl. Joan followed, and then Rick.

Dave Cutler stood with his thumbs hooked over the belt of his blue jeans, looking at them with mingled anxiety and tolerant amusement. He was a middle-aged man with the light, penetrating eyes so common among men accustomed to looking over the vast distances of the Southwest.

"Sure I can't talk you out of this?" he said. "It's wild country back there. You may run out of water. You may get lost. And if you get lost in one of those hundreds of canyons, chances are you'll never be found. Besides, there's no gold back there. I don't care what some Madison Square Garden cowboy told you. Those rodeo hands are worse than sailors when it comes to tall stories."

Tensing a little, Joan thrust her hands more deeply into the pockets of her whipcord breeches. She and Rick had agreed that it was best to admit they were looking for gold. "They'll put us down as three more crazy Easterners," Rick had said. "But if we say we're just going on a camping trip, they might smell a rat."

Joan said clearly, "We'll be careful. We won't get lost."

Dave Cutler gave them a defeated shrug. "All right. I'll meet you here in a week. If one of you breaks a leg or something, and you have to come back earlier, build a big fire. Scout planes fly over once in awhile. They might see the fire and get in touch with us."

He untied the mooring line, stepped back into the raft. Bending, Rick gave the raft a push, sent it into the muddy current. "So long," Dave Cutler said above the outboard motor's roar, and then added, his voice barely audible, "Crazy tenderfeet!"

They watched the raft chug up the river, disappear around the bend. Silence closed in, unbroken except for the river's liquid voice. Tall and slim in blue jeans and plaid shirt, Rick walked over to the burro, drew something out from beneath the pack of cooking utensils and sleeping bags, something long and slim in a canvas cover. He unsnapped the cover and drew

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out the rifle, a thirty-two with a telescopic sight affixed to the slim barrel.

Newly and unpleasantly aware of the empty, sunlit silence, Joan watched him break the rifle and squint down the barrel. In her excitement, her anxiety over their late start from Tehachi, she hadn't noticed that the burro's pack included a rifle. She felt the drumming of the pulse in the hollow of her throat. Back in New York, the idea of physical violence had seemed almost ridiculously improbable. But now there was just three of them in this alien place, two women and an armed man.

She said more sharply than she had intended, "Why the gun?"

He lifted his head. In the shadow of his broad-brimmed western hat, his blue eyes were steady and expressionless, but she had the distinct feeling that inwardly he was laughing at her, just as he had that night on the bridge in Central Park. He said, "Beans and flapjacks will get pretty monotonous. I thought we might supplement the cuisine with a little game. Besides, we may run across bobcats, rattlers—"

Joan heard Cousin Hattie's terrified gasp. Turning, she saw that the older woman had undergone one of her lightening changes from study competence to quivering femininity. One hand gripped her throat and her face was white. "I'm terrified of even a picture of—"

"There's not much danger," Rick said. "We're all wearing heavy boots. Of course, if you should happen to pass a ledge where—"

Joan's sharp look made him break off in mid-sentence. "Well, stay away from ledges," he said. "Keep in the middle of the canyon."

He crooked the rifle under his arm, looked at Joan with that closed, remote expression his face had worn ever since they left New York. "All set?" he asked. "Got the ring? We follow your directions for the first half of the trip, remember."

She looked at him levelly. "The ring is in New York, in my safety deposit box. I memorized the directions."

He returned her gaze steadily. "That makes you indispensable, doesn't it, at least for the first half of the trip?"

Her smile was even. "I meant it to."

"Well, I hope you've got a good memory. Otherwise we're lost before we've started."

"My memory's fine, thanks."

It was, but she hadn't trusted to it entirely. She had also scratched the directions on the inside of her cigarette case, where she could refer to them at any time. When the idea had first occurred to her, back in New York, the precaution had seemed so unnecessary that she was a little ashamed of it. But now, as she looked at Rick's remote, unreadable face across the few feet that separated them, she was glad that she had been so sensible.

He said, "We'd better start if we're to get any place before sundown."

LEADING THE burro, he crossed the sand and started through the willows that choked the canyon entrance. Joan and Cousin Hattie followed. A few yards beyond the screening willows they found themselves in a dry, desolate world which might have been miles from the nearest water. Rocks ranging from pebbles to good-sized boulders, interspersed with the bayonet-sharp spikes of the soapweed plant, filled the ancient stream bed. Almost perpendicular cliffs, a strip of blue sky between them, walled the canyon.

Up ahead Joan saw the first fork in the canyon. She halted, took a cigarette from her case, checked the first few letters scratched on the inner surface. When Rick looked back questioningly, she was tapping a cigarette against the closed case. "We turn right," she said.

A few minutes later, she saw how easy it would be to lose oneself hopelessly in this arid maze. This canyon was exactly

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like the one they had left—rocks, sparse vegetation, steep red cliffs, and the narrow river of sky above, sometimes with a desert hawk sailing across it.

At five o'clock, with the sun still shining redly on the eastern cliff, shadows were already thick in the canyon. They made camp, built a fire beside the stream bed, dined frugally on coffee and beans and pancakes. Afterward they sat around the dying fire, their few strained, impersonal comments on the day's events finally trailing off into silence.

Standing up, Rick kicked a stray ember into the fire. "Well, I'm turning in," he said abruptly. He picked up his rifle, carried it with him over to the burro, and drew sleeping bags from the pack. He dropped two of them on the ground. Then, carrying the third, he walked several yards up the canyon, cleared a few stones away with his foot, and spread the sleeping bag out.

Joan said, "We'd better get to sleep, too."

For a long time after she was snug and warm inside the fleece-lined bag she gazed up at the star-brilliant river of sky. Resentfully, helplessly, she found that she was very much aware of Rick lying there several yards away in the darkness. Was he also disturbingly aware of her presence? Perhaps, she told herself cynically, but more probably he was thinking of that vein of gold ore.

Had he been deceived by the cigarette case ruse, or did he realize that she must have some sort of written record with her? She tried to assure herself that Rick, no matter what else he might be, was no murderer, but nevertheless she lay tense, half expecting to hear stealthy movement, and to see a tall figure, rifle in hand, blot out the fire's last feeble glow as he moved toward her. Then, abruptly, she was overwhelmed by the effects of the long, strenuous day in the open. The next things she knew was the delicious fragrance of coffee, and the cold bite of daybreak in the air, and the pale blue of the morning sky overhead.

FOR AWHILE that day was exactly like the one before, except that, as they moved through the maze of arid canyons, Joan, now and then, saw evidence that others had passed this way—a cracked, curled boot sole lying between two stones, a frying pan nearly consumed with red rust, half a whiskey bottle, turned a lovely amethyst by decades of strong sunlight. Had Jim Ainsley or Ulysses Ordway tossed that empty bottle there? Had alcohol fed that smouldering resentment between them until it flamed into hatred?

Cousin Hattie's taut voice broke in on her thoughts. "Joan! Mr. Ainsley!"

Joan turned. Cousin Hattie hurried forward. She looked strained and disheveled, as if the stiff pace Rick had set was beginning to tell. She said, in an almost hysterical whisper, "Someone is following us! I heard a sound, and I looked back, and I saw something dodge behind that big boulder."

Joan felt a prickling sensation along her scalp. She looked back down the canyon. Nothing but boulders and red cliffs and the empty sunlight. Rick said, "It's the silence and the monotony. It plays tricks with your nerves after awhile."

"I saw what I saw," the woman insisted stubbornly. Then, as Rick and Joan looked at her unbelievingly, she added, "Well, maybe it was only an animal, but I saw something. Don't walk so fast after this. I want to keep close to you. Besides, I'm tired."

"All right," Rick said. "We'll slow down."

Cousin Hattie was quiet the rest of the day, but that night, as they sat around the campfire, she kept glancing over her shoulder into the darkness. Only Rick's calm, remote manner kept the older woman's nervousness from communicat-

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ing itself to Joan. Rick seemed to have no nerves.

"Let's go to bed, Cousin Hattie," Joan said finally. "You'll feel better in the morning."

But Cousin Hattie didn't look better in the morning. Her long face was haggard, and her tin coffee cup shook slightly in her hand. Although she didn't complain, it was obvious that she had slept badly.

They struck camp, moved on through the silent, arid canyons. As the morning wore on, Joan grew increasingly uneasy. According to the scratched figures inside her cigarette case, they would soon complete the first half of the journey, and she would no longer be, in Rick's phrase, "indispensable."

Shortly before noon, they neared another fork in the canyon. Joan halted. "Rick," she called in a strained voice. When he turned she added, "You take over from here."

He stood there, the rifle under his arm, his hat shadowing his expressionless face. She stared at him through the lengthening silence, hearing a faint, churning sound which she recognized after a moment as the pulsing of her blood.

Then he said deliberately, "Fine. After this you won't need to smoke so much, will you?" And she realized, half with relief, half with chagrin, that he had been aware all along of her little stratagem, and was secretly amused by it.

He took a slip of paper from his shirt pocket and consulted it. Then, seizing the burro's bridle, he started up the right hand canyon.

In the early afternoon they came to a group of willows leaning over the dry river bed. Rick jerked his thumb toward the trees. "That means there's water not far underground," he said, quickening excitement in his voice. "We ought to find it on the surface soon."

They had moved only a few yards past the willows when Joan heard Cousin Hattie's frightened intake of breath. She turned to see the woman pointing toward the trees. "I saw him that time!" she said, her voice high and thin. "He dodged into those trees!"

Without speaking, Rick strode back along the stream bed, disappeared into the willows. When he emerged a moment later he said, "There's no one." He looked keenly at Cousin Hattie's strained face. "Don't you realize that if anyone were following us, Joan and I would be aware of it too?"

The woman said, her voice shaking, "But I was sure I—"

"Look. We'll take it easy from now on, and make camp early tonight. You'd better walk between Joan and me. You'll feel less nervous that way."

AN HOUR later they encountered the first thin stream. After a few hundred yards it vanished, only to reappear further on, wider now and running swiftly. Again and again the stream sank into the thirsty earth and then came to the surface, each time in greater volume. That night they went to sleep with the sound of clear, turbulent water loud in their ears.

By noon the next day the stream had become a river, frothing as it swept around the large boulders, nearly filling the canyon bed, so that only a narrow passage of dry earth was left along the base of the right-hand cliff. Two hours later they began to hear a roaring louder than that of the river. Then, just before three o'clock, they rounded a bend in the canyon wall and saw the falls, wide and white and lovely, catching miniature rainbows in its lacy mist as it plunged fifty feet from a broad ledge to the clean green pool below.

Rick and Joan looked at each other, and for a moment there was no suspicion or resentment between them, no bittersweet memories, nothing but the excite-

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ment of two adventurers catching first sight of their goal.

"If my grandfather's memory didn't fail him," Rick said, "we'll see those three spires in twenty minutes or so, and reach them in less than an hour. If we hurry, we'll have time to climb up and take a look at that ore tonight."

He walked to the burro, thrust the rifle beneath the pack. "We'll leave our friend Longears here," he said exuberantly. "We'll travel light—and fast."

"Fast!" Cousin Hattie wailed. "Fast!" She sank onto a boulder and put her hand across her eyes.

Joan thought, She's going to pieces completely. She said aloud: "But Cousin Hattie, don't you want to see what we've come all this way to see?"

"I don't want to see anything! I'm tired, I tell you. I want a bath, and a decent meal, and a bed with sheets. I was crazy to let you talk me into coming on this dreadful trip."

Diplomatically Joan refrained from pointing out that, far from being talked into coming, Cousin Hattie herself had suggested it. She put a soothing hand on the older woman's shoulder. "You don't have to come with us. You wait here. We'll be back soon."

"You won't be back until dark, and I'll be alone here!"

"We'll be back in less than two hours," Rick said. "We won't climb up to the ore tonight. We'll just try to spot it from the valley floor."

They left Cousin Hattie sitting there, her elbow on her knee and her long face resting against her hand. With Rick leading, they turned away from the falls and up a canyon broader than the one they had left, with brush-covered walls which sloped gently. After awhile the roar of the falls faded away and there was no sound but the crunch of their boots over stones and rough gravel, and, once, the startling whir of wings as a desert hawk, starting up from a clump of greasewood, flew across their path.

At each bend in the canyon, Joan scanned the cliffs eagerly, and yet it was Rick who first sighted the three spires of rock. "There!" he shouted. Her gaze following his pointing finger. Another curve in the canyon walls hid the base of the formation, but she could see the tops of the three rocky towers, red in the light from the declining sun, the tall central tower flanked by two shorter ones, like the spire of a Gothic cathedral.

"Two miles at most," Rick said over his shoulder, and quickened his long stride.

THEN, abruptly, he stopped and turned toward her. Beneath the shadowing hat brim, his face was tense, deathly white. "Get down!" he said softly: *"Get down!"*

Joan, a few yards away, halted and stared at him uncomprehendingly. "Get down!" he repeated. Then, as she stood motionless, he sprinted back across the space that separated them. His left hand grasping her arm, his shoulder against hers, he dragged her down to the rocky stream bed. She heard a vicious, whining noise, like that of an oversized mosquito, and then the spat of metal against rock.

"Keep flat," Rick said. "We've got to work our way back between those two boulders."

The air was full of that mosquito-whine now. She saw a blurred something strike a stone, ricochet off. Digging elbows and boot heels into the rocky sand, feeling Rick's firm grasp on her upper arm, she inched her way beside him back to the cool, sandy space between two giant boulders. Again metal struck against rock, and then there was silence.

Rick was close beside her, propped up on one elbow. She looked up at him, her face paper white. "Someone is trying to kill us."

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He nodded. "I happened to glance up at the cliff, and saw the glint of a rifle barrel. Someone has been moving along the face of the cliff, parallel to our course. It must have been rough going, but not too rough, the way the cliff slants. And there are enough bushes to provide good cover. He saw me point out those rock spires, and knew he couldn't miss the gold ore now. And so he let us have it." He paused, and then added bitterly, "Damn it all, why did I leave my own rifle back there by the falls?"

She said thinly, "So Cousin Hattie was right. Someone has been following us. Maybe he listened to us at night, heard us say that the gold was opposite those three rocks, and waited for us to lead him there."

– "It looks that way."

"Dave Cutler?"

"Maybe, but I'd have sworn Cutler was okay."

"Do you think that the person on the cliff will come down after us?"

"I doubt it. We've got good cover here. And he can't be sure we haven't a revolver. I think he'll wait until we come out from between these boulders."

He, she thought. Who was he? Who knew they had come on this trip? Well, Bonnie, of course. But the thought of round-faced little Bonnie hidden up there on the cliff with a rifle in her hands was too absurd.

WHO ELSE knew? Cousin Hattie, like Bonnie, had been pledged to secrecy, but there was one person she would have told. Her son, Gerald. Sullen, greedy Gerald. She could imagine his mother saying, "Precious, Joan is going to be rich again. And she's broken off with Scott Landreth, and she's going to get an annulment from that Ainsley person. If you only play your cards right, precious—"

What if Gerald had decided that there were surer and quicker ways than marriage of cashing in on old Ulysses Ordway's gold strike?

But it didn't have to be Gerald. She had told someone else about the journey that was to start at Navajo Landing. She had told Scott.

No, she thought, not Scott. She no longer loved Scott, but the years during which they had grown up together had left her with an affection for him, an inability to picture him as ruthless.

Her thoughts veered away. Someone had been on the trail of the gold ore even before she and Rick and Cousin Hattie had planned this trip. Someone had listened in the garden of the Sixty-Third Street house while she and Bonnie, in the glass-enclosed study, had talked about the ring and the night old Ulysses died. Someone had preceded her to the Long Island house, and started to dislodge the tile from the fireplace. At the time she

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had assumed it was Rick, but now she knew it had been someone else, the same person, in all probability, who now crouched up there somewhere on the sun-warmed cliff, waiting—

She looked up at Rick, and suddenly everything inside her seemed to tighten. She said sickly, "Rick, take off your hat."

His blue eyes puzzled, he reached up and lifted the broad-brimmed hat from his bright hair. He held it in his hand, and they both stared at the bullet hole drilled neatly through the crown.

He managed to grin. "Close," he said.

Joan said haltingly, "When you saw that rifle aimed at you, the instinctive thing for you to do would have been to drop to the ground. Instead you looked back and warned me, and when I didn't understand, you ran back across that open space, a perfect target all that time—"

He smiled, but his blue eyes were unamused, bitter. "What do you want me to do, apply for a medal or something? Men do it all the time, you know. It's an old tradition. Women and children first. Men stand on sinking liners and watch women they don't even know pull away in lifeboats. So why should you be surprised that I risked my neck for someone I—"

He broke off abruptly, his mouth a straight, self-mocking line. Joan looked up at him, feeling the bitterness and suspicion of the last few days slip away, feeling her heart swell with that old, lovely excitement, that old longing to be in his arms. She said unevenly, "Say it, Rick, say it."

"I don't have to say it. You must know I haven't stopped loving you just because you stopped loving me."

"But I didn't stop," she said, past the ache of tears in her throat. "I just stopped believing in you for a while. Oh Rick, Rick—"

He looked down at her, and the gladness which leaped into his eyes was so swift and overwhelming that it made her feel a little dizzy. His arm slid under her, lifting her, gathering her close against him. She clung to him, unaware for a timeless moment of the lonely silence and the rocky, faintly damp sand and the faceless someone waiting up there on the cliff, aware of nothing but the arms around her and the warm lips, a little desperate with long denial, against her own.

When the kiss ended, he still held her so close that she could feel the heavy racing of his heart. He said, his hand pressing her head against his shoulder, "Then you're ready to forgive—"

"We forgive each other, and we'll talk no more about forgiveness. Oh Rick, if we get out of this—"

"What do you mean, if?" he said exultantly. "We're lucky, baby. Right now I feel loaded with luck. We'll get out of it." She felt his lips touch her forehead. "Joan, Joan darling—"

She said with an uneven laugh, "This will be a blow to Cousin Hattie. I know she's counted on her son marrying me—me and Grandpa Ordway's gold mine, of course."

SUDDENLY she stiffened in his arms. Drawing a little away from him, she said, "Cousin Hattie! She's alone back there. Maybe she heard the shooting. She's about ready to crack up anyway. If she's alone when night comes she might—well, we've got to get back to her."

Rick's face was sober. "I guess you're right. She's in danger too. Whoever's after us certainly doesn't plan on letting her get away to talk about it. I'll try to make it back to camp. You stay here."

"No, Rick. Let me come with you. I'd be afraid to stay here."

After a moment, he nodded reluctantly. "Maybe you'd better come with me. If that guy up there sees me leave, and knows you're alone down here—" He broke off, and then went on rapidly, "He

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doesn't seem to be much of a marksman. He shot about a dozen times, and came close only once. Besides, there are enough boulders in the creek bottom to provide some cover. In the open stretches, run a few steps and then drop down." He grinned. "Too bad you were never a buck private. They teach you that sort of thing in the Army."

"I think I get the idea."

He maneuvered past her in the narrow, sheltered space, crouched at the boulder's edge. Looking back he asked, "All set?"

She was up on one knee now, her back and the palms of her hands flattened against the boulder, her face white. "All set," she said.

Twenty minutes later they reached the shadowed pool at the foot of the falls. To Joan's puzzled relief, there had been no whine of bullets during their zig-zagging race back along the dry canyon, no perceptible movement along the face of the cliff, no sound but that of her footsteps and Rick's, and the apprehensive drumming of her blood.

Now they stopped short beside the pool, looked at the patient burro which stood alone on the rock-strewn sand between the river and the tall undergrowth at the base of the cliff.

Joan said bewilderedly, "She's gone."

For a moment there was no sound but the roaring of the falls. Then Rick said quietly, "My rifle's gone, too."

As Joan stood there, she knew suddenly that there was another presence nearby, an unseen, listening presence. Her constricted throat made her voice sound thin. "Cousin Hattie!" she called. "Cousin Hattie!"

There was a rustling noise, and the tall undergrowth at the foot of the cliff parted. Joan saw the leveled rifle first. Then her eyes traveled up the leather-jacketed arms to the face.

In B movies she had seen expressions like that—the cunning, cruel smile, the coldly, triumphant eyes—and always she had been inclined to laugh. But now, staring at Cousin Hattie, she knew a human face could look like that.

Joan said slowly, "I should have realized it was you. You came through the garden entrance that night I ran away from Rick because you knew that Bonnie would be in the study. And when you heard Bonnie and me talk about the ring and about the night Grandpa Ordway died, you suddenly realized that when he pointed straight ahead of him, he was pointing to the fireplace. You knew that his bed used to face the fireplace, because you were there the night he died. None of the others, except Bonnie, would have guessed that the ring was hidden in the fireplace. Rick and Gordon and Scott couldn't have, because they were never in the Long Island house until years after Grandpa Ordway died."

Cousin Hattie's smile widened a little. Rick said quietly, "Mrs. Ordway, put down that gun."

"Oh, no!" Cousin Hattie said. "I missed you back there. I was never a good shot. And so I came back here and waited for you. I knew you'd come back. And I can't miss at fifteen feet, can I?"

Joan said, from a dry throat, "But why, Cousin Hattie? Why?"

SHE SAW hatred flare in the long, plain face. "Why? I'll tell you why. Because you and Bonnie always had everything—looks, money, pretty clothes, everything. But my two poor chicks never had anything. With the right clothes, my Pauline might have been good-looking too. And look at Gerald. All his talent wasted because I don't have enough money to give him a chance. Why do you think I looked after you and that bratty sister of yours after your mother died, helping you to buy your clothes, nursing you when you were sick, going to your

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silly school plays and exhibits until I was so bored I could scream? Because I thought your father would mention me in his will, that's why. But did he? I didn't get a penny, not even an old piece of jewelry. Well, I'll have plenty of money now."

Joan thought sickly, if I could only reason with her, bargain with her. You could do that with rational people. But Cousin Hattie was obviously not quite right. The way she had tried to frighten them, for instance, with the notion that someone was trailing them. Only a mind off balance could have conceived such a senseless bit of malice.

Nevertheless, Joan tried. "If the gold ore is really rich, Cousin Hattie, there'll be enough money for all of us. I always intended for you to have part of it."

"Why should I take part, when I can have all of it?"

"Because you can't get away with this," Rick said in that same quiet voice.

Her cold gaze swung toward him. "Oh, yes, I can. When I'm finished here I'll drag the two of you up some side canyon. It will be hard, but I can do it. I climbed the side of the canyon, didn't I, and kept pace with you two even though you had a head start and easier going. I'll cover you over with rocks. Then I'll go back to Navajo Landing. Oh, I won't get lost. Half the directions for getting back are scratched inside Joan's cigarette case, and the other half are on a slip of paper in your shirt pocket. I'll say that the three of us discovered the ore together. Then you two wandered up another canyon, and didn't come back. Oh, they'll doubt my story, but they won't be able to disprove it until you're found, and that may not be for years, or centuries, or forever."

Joan saw the rifle lift a little higher, imagined she could even see the long finger tightening around the trigger. And then, from the corner of her eye, she saw something else move, there on a ledge of rock two feet from the woman's face. The gathering coils, the triangular head, the darting tongue—

"Cousin Hattie," she said thinly, "there on the ledge beside you—"

The woman's face seemed to freeze for a moment. Then she said, "Don't try to scare me with your silly tricks."

Through the steady sound of the falls came the first, ominous rattle. Cousin Hattie made a thin, strangled noise and crumpled to the ground. The rifle clattered from her hand, struck a rock, and went off, spitting yellow flames in the fading daylight. Rick took a few quick strides, scooped up the rifle, aimed it toward the ledge. There was a sharp report, and then the triangular head sank from view.

While Joan stood there, trembling with suddenly released tension, Rick walked to the river bank, came back with a dripping handkerchief. Kneeling beside the unconscious woman, he laid the handkerchief on her forehead, chafed her hands. After a moment she opened her eyes, looked at Rick, and then turned her head away.

Hands under her arms, Rick helped her to her feet, led her over to a large rock. She sat down and covered her long face with shaking hands. Rick said, "We'll have no more trouble with that one."

Watching the uncontrollable tremors which shook the woman's body, hearing the dry, racking sobs, Joan thought, No, she'll make no more trouble. Cousin Hattie's former collapse had been a skillful fraud, but this, obviously, was the real thing.

Joan said, her voice coldly and impersonally soothing. "It's all right, Cousin Hattie. You're not well. When we get back to New York, you must see a doctor. No one needs to know about this, no one but the doctor."

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RICK WAS emptying the last of the cartridges from the rifle chamber. "Just to make sure she doesn't try it again," he explained. He thrust the unloaded rifle beneath the burro's pack. Then, glancing at the huddled figure on the rock, he said, "Maybe we'd better leave her alone with herself for a few minutes."

Joan looked around her, shivering. "Yes, let's get away from here for a little while."

He gave her a strained smile. "We can still make it to those rock spires before dark, and it would give us something else to think about."

Joan said quickly, "All right."

Eyes averted, she walked past Cousin Hattie. Together she and Rick turned to the right and started to retrace their steps up the dry stream bed. They walked close together now, saying little, Rick helping her over the rough spots. Shadows were thick in the canyon when they again saw the cathedral spires, only the tall middle one still catching the sun's rays. Rick said, "As soon as we round the next bend we'll be there."

Walking faster now, they moved through the gathering dark and rounded the bend in the canyon wall. Then they stopped short, staring ahead with stunned, unbelieving eyes.

Atop the left wall of the canyon rose the rocky spires. Directly opposite, a great cone of earth ran down from the top of the right wall, spreading out to a base so vast that only a narrow passageway was left between it and the left canyon wall.

Rick was the first to speak. "Landslide," he said. "Millions of tons of earth. Even if we could get the equipment up here, which we could never do, it would take months and months and hundreds of thousands of dollars to clear the face of the cliff. It's one of those tricks of fate."

Joan said nothing. After a moment Rick went on, "It's fairly recent, too. Vegetation hasn't even started to grow on the surface. In fact, although you can't be sure in this light, it looks to me as if the earth is still damp in spots."

He turned and looked at her. "Our two grandfathers' lost gold mine is surely lost now—but good."

They stared at each other for a moment through the fading light. Then, simultaneously, they broke into laughter, their heads thrown back, the gay, young sound echoing and re-echoing through the age-old silence.

After a long moment Joan said weakly, "Will you please tell me why on earth we're laughing? I can't see anything funny about this."

"Simple," Rick said. "Happy people can always enjoy a good joke, even when it's on themselves. And we're happy. Why shouldn't we be? We're young and healthy, and we can earn enough for coffee and cakes and even champagne once in awhile, and we're in love. Thousands of people would trade all the gold buried under that landslide for just a little bit of what we've got right now. We're very lucky people."

They looked at each other, lips still smiling but eyes grave. He drew her to him, and his bright head bent to her dark one. For a long moment they kissed, her lips soft and eager beneath his, her arms locked tightly around his neck, as if she would never let him go.

Then she said softly, her cheek resting against his shoulder, "We'd be fools to trade what we've got for all the gold in Fort Knox. And even then I wouldn't trade you for anything in the world."

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HER PERFUME, especially blended to match her personality, released into the air the sweet haunting scent of Riviera mimosa and jasmine. The dress of sea-blue taffeta, cunningly draped, had cost more than most of the girls at the Club dance would have to spend on their entire wardrobe in a year. But as Leith Hargraves added the last touches of powder and lipstick in front of the long mirror in the dressing room, it was not of her own lustre and pearls that she was conscious, but of the tawdry, often worn, and not too well-fitting yellow chiffon strapless dress that looked as if at any moment it might fall away from the beautifully curved shoulders of Elaine Cory, who stood beside her. When you were the most beautiful girl in town, with bright gold hair, and an arrogant red mouth, you didn't need wealth to help you look well, Leith thought, with a pang, regarding her own soft brown hair and, distastefully, her oval face. There was no question about it. From a plain freckle-faced, pig-tailed little girl, she had grown into a pleasant, but very definitely plain girl. And all the money in the world wouldn't make up for that, when you were in love with a man who was always surrounded by lovely women at every step he took. Just as she thought of Clark and sighed, Elaine swung around, and said brightly:

"New dress, Leith? It's very chic, though I do think that sea-blue is difficult to wear, don't you? Of course, with those pearls, you can get away with anything. How is the gorgeous Clark, anyway? Still rushing from bedside to bedside being charming to rich patients?"

There were at least three separate barbs in that short speech. It was cleverly managed to remind Leith that probably sea-blue had been the wrong choice of color for herself, and that her jewels might seem slightly ostentatious. But the matter of attractive young doctors and rich patients was a very ordinary sort of jest, of which she was well aware,

As Beauty Does

By

Dorothy Dow

Leith forgot the one thing that Clark remembered—the woman a man loves is always beautiful to him.

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"If you're telling me you don't love me," Clark said harshly, "I'm telling you that I don't believe you."

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since it was as Clark's patient that the heiress to the Hargraves had grown to know and to love him. "It doesn't matter," she told herself quickly, her color rising. "Elaine chased Clark and everyone in town knows that she was carrying a torch for him until our engagement was announced. She's just jealous."

But it didn't do any good to think that, because deep in her heart was the gnawing consciousness that she was the jealous one—jealous of Elaine's insolent loveliness, and the power it gave her, and the security which lay in that power. If a man proposed to Elaine, no one would ever think it could be anything but love.

Thrusting that thought aside, she smiled lightly. "Clark is at the hospital, as usual, but he'll be here later. I'm sorry you don't like my dress, Elaine. It would be lovely on you, Oh, hello, Joan—"

The dark girl coming into the room in a swirl of cerise satin, smiled dazzingly. "Hi, Leith, what lovely bracelets. Hi, Elaine, you'll knock their eyes out tonight. Hurry up, honey, you and Bill are sitting with us. Oh, Leith, I got the invitation to the dance, and I'll be there in all my glory, meaning by that the best dress I can afford to buy, which probably won't be much. How's the fascinating Clark?"

It was pretty much of a repitition of what Elaine had said, phrased differently. If Elaine were the prettiest blonde in town, Joan was the most gorgeous brunette. And she had liked Clark, too. But then, most of the girls in town had set their sails for the attractive, new young doctor.

Above Leith's murmur of response, Joan went on gayly, "You know, I never have forgiven you for snatching him right away from the rest of us, three months after he landed in town, Leith. But, of course, against you, none of the rest of us had a chance."

Against your money was what Joan meant; it was as plain as day. Leith slipped her compact inside her gold purse, and left the room almost running, her cheeks blazing. For two weeks and seven days, ever since her engagement to Clark had been announced, she had been suffering from catty girls, catty remarks—even some catty remarks from men. And yet, until Clark had fallen in love with her, they had all been her friends, they had gathered at her house, they had made her the center of their group.

SHE THOUGHT desperately, It's just my imagination. There isn't any malicious meaning in lots of the things they say. I just imagine it. But she could not convince herself. Her fingers shook a little, as she slipped into Hugh Kenna's arms, and drifted off to the music. Hugh had driven her over, because Clark had called him up, and asked him to. Clark was detained at the hospital. Yes, and now that she allowed herself to remember it, Hugh's first remark had been, merrily, "Hi! Clark sent me to look after his property!"

She bit her lip, aware that she had not heard a word that Hugh was saying as they danced. Then a hand touched her arm, and Leon Perry was cut in, and after Leon, Tim Ray. Then again, she was dancing with Hugh, but she was lost in her own unhappy thoughts, until he startled her out of them by giving her a little shake.

"Don't tell me you're so entranced by the music that you won't even turn around when he enters the room. Here comes Glamour Boy in person, and Miss America."

She looked over Hugh's shoulders, startled. Clark had arrived at the dance, and instead of seeking her out the first thing, he was dancing with Elaine, and smiling into her eyes!

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"They certainly look all right together," Hugh said heartily. "Handsomest guy and handsomest girl in the world. Better break that up, honey." He danced her over in their direction. Leith felt her heart reject the pain that assaulted it. When Elaine, all gold and rose, danced with Clark, so bronze and handsome, she was reminded of a nymph and a Greek god. They looked so right together that the rhythm to which her feet moved automatically seemed to stab at her heart with the point of a sharp knife.

She thought suddenly and blazingly, "I'm so unhappy that I can hardly bear it. And I've been unhappy ever since my engagement to Clark was announced. Life is too long, pain is too hard to bear. Not even love is worth it." Then Clark's arms had pulled her lose, and he and Hugh had changed girls in the middle of the dance floor.

"Glad to see me?" Clark asked, and then, in quite another tone of voice, he said almost angrily, "We're getting out of here." He guided her toward the door. Leith moved in a fog, overcome by a fatalistic feeling of destiny. All along, having Clark in love with her had seemed too wonderful to be true and now she understood the reason for that feeling. Side by side on the terrace, with the lovely smell of autumn in the air, and the last warmth of October almost as caressing as the first smile of June, they paused. Clark spoke first, impatiently:

"ALL RIGHT, tell me. Something's very wrong. What is it?"

"Everything's wrong—about us, I mean," Leith said, forcing her voice to steadiness. She pulled the old garnet and seed pearl ring off her finger and held it out to him. "This is wrong. It doesn't go with me, Clark. I was mistaken about wanting to marry you. Our engagement was a mistake, and the sooner a mistake is cleared up, the better it will be for everyone."

"If you're telling me you don't love me," Clark said, his voice harsh, "I'm telling you I don't believe you." He jerked her to him, not with tenderness, but with a controlled passion, and his mouth was fierce. She shuddered under the kisses, but there was something stronger than the desire they awakened. She called it pride.

"I'm not telling you that I don't love you, Clark. I'm just telling you that I don't love you enough to marry you and go through life having people say what they have been saying. That—that—"

"That I'm a beginning doctor, even if a brilliant one, and that you're one of the richest girls in the state? That you are buying me? Is that what you can't stand, Leith?"

She cringed at the scorn in his tone, but somehow, even that was not great enough to change the determination

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which had been growing for days, and which had come to a head on the dance floor. "That's it. That's what I can't stand. Maybe I'm not big enough. Maybe I'm not brave enough. I don't know. I just know that I'm not happy."

"If you're not happy," he said serenely, "then, of course, the best thing is to break the engagement." He reached out and took the charming little antique ring which she had adored so much. He dropped it into his pocket as if it were worthless. Leith stared at him, her lips parted in wordless surprise. She had expected an argument, anger, love-making. She had anticipated a scene, or pleas, or brute force—anything but this amiable agreement with what she had said. All at once, the full force of what had happened hit her.

She had broken her engagement, and Clark, who pretended to love her so passionately, had not even argued! She had given his ring back, and Clark, who had said "forever" only last night, had taken it with no words! Did any one need stronger proof that what the other girls had been saying was true, that Clark didn't really love her, that it was only her wealth which had dazzled him? Elaine was right—Joan was right—

She was crying with the dry painful sobs of humiliation and chagrin. Then, impetuously, Clark had picked her up in his arms, and was carrying her across the terrace, to the drive, where his car was parked.

"Breaking an engagement is undoubtedly a nerve wracking thing for a girl who has always prided herself on keeping her word," he said. "So I won't scold you for going to pieces. But I'm going to drive you to my office, Leith, and get you something to make you sleep. And then I'm going to drive you home, where you can sleep well and wake free, since that's what you want."

"It isn't what I want at all," her heart groaned, shaken by an intolerable anguish, but her stiff lips revealed nothing whatever of what went on in her heart. Sitting beside him, rigidly keeping to her side of the car, Leith found herself looking at Clark's profile with a nagging wonder, because all at once it seemed to be the profile of a stranger. She could remember so many things—the period of growing up as a heiress, which had never been easy; the period of being proposed to by Hugh and Tod, and half a dozen other handsome, casual boys, who somehow never seemed quite real; and then, the period of falling in love with Clark, and of realizing, slowly and a little incredulously, that he was in love with her. But the period of falling in love hadn't been long. Actually it had happened almost in a moment, when the handsome, severe young man who had taken over old Dr. Paddock's practice had walked into her bedroom when she had been sick with flu.

In that very first moment, her carefully controlled heart had turned a handspring; and it had been turning handsprings at the thought of Clark, ever since. Now her heart was a dead weight.

SHE SAT absolutely still, blinking back tears, and counting the time to when she could cry. Five minutes for Clark to unlock his office, five minutes for him to return to the car, twenty minutes to drive her home—

"I want you to come up to the office with me," he said crisply, and his hand on her arm impelled her. She would have argued the matter, except that she could not trust her voice. They went up one flight of steps, and then another, and Clark unlocked a door. Electricity flashed into the neat empty waiting room. Clark half-led, half-pushed her across the room to his inner office which opened into his laboratory. He closed the door, and they were alone in his inner office.

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"Before I forget it, I'm going to kiss you good-by," he said almost casually. But there was nothing casual about his mouth or his arms. Too exhausted emotionally to struggle, Leith gave herself up to that last lovely kiss, which would be something to remember. Somehow her arms were around his neck. In another moment, she would have been weeping on his shoulder and begging him to give the ring back to her but his hands, reaching up to disengage her arms, were firm and steady, so that she felt repelled.

He's glad I changed my mind, she thought, bitterly, because he realized he couldn't go through with it. Then she gave a sharp little cry because Clark had moved away, and pushed this button off, and that one on; so that the office in which she stood was dark. But through the doorway, the lighted screen of his x-ray room showed, white and bright.

He moved across the brightness, searching in his files for something. For one moment he stood silhouetted—slim, of medium height, but apparently made of steel, arrogant in his strength and assurance.

"Of course, you lied to me just now," he said almost lazily. "When you said you were breaking the engagement because you could not take the catty things people always say when a rich girl marries a poor man. You're not as much of a coward as all that, Leith. The reason you're really breaking the engagement is because you don't think you're beautiful enough to compete with lovely girls on their own ground. Maybe you're right. I cherish a lot of pictures of lovely girls, I admit. Maybe we'll both be happier if I come clean and let you see what a really lovely girl looks like to me."

HIS HANDS were busy as he talked. He pulled something from a file and inserted it in a case behind a screen, and then flicked lights off and on. Leith trembled, but Clark's voice was as steady as if he were giving a surgical lecture.

"This, for instance, is a picture of the most beautiful yellow-haired girl I ever saw. I won't call names, because doctors don't. Even if we were married, I couldn't. But this is the way I always remember her. You see, she came to me when she was suffering from a gastric upset because of too many cocktails, and we took this picture."

"Clark!"

"And this is the picture of the most beautiful brunette I know. Again we don't mention names, but she came to me when she was suffering from a cough and thought it might be tuberculosis. It was only too many cigarettes."

"Clark!"

"And this one, too small to show on the screen, unfortunately, is the picture of really the loveliest girl I ever saw, if you think you can't compete with that—"

Her knees shook, as she turned away from that absurd x-ray screen, and from the ridiculous pictures of skeletons in grim outline, which had just flashed across it. Her hand shook as she leaned over, and picked up the snapshot.

It was a picture of a girl in blue jeans and a sweater. There were no pearls for glamour, and there was no mansion for background. The girl stood in a field, with her hair blowing in the wind, and she cradled a tiny baby lamb in her arms. It was a silly picture. She had not even remembered that Clark had taken it. It was a silly picture of a plain, happy girl.

She stared, with a new light in her eyes, because all at once, the girl wasn't plain. Something about the girl's face, which was her own face, was almost dazzlingly bright with happiness and sweetness.

"I'm not crying. I'm laughing." It was quite true. She was laughing harder

(Please turn to page 97)

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The Scorpio Personality

(For Those Born Between October 24th and November 22nd)

THOSE BORN during October 24th to November 22nd have the double symbol of a Scorpion and an Eagle, indicating the basic qualities of those born in the sign Scorpio.

These pictorial symbols portray the tremendous persistency and intensity that are the dominant elements of the Scorpio temperament. The Scorpion indicates whether they are restrained, the Eagle, the ability to apply them towards creative and idealistic aims. You have the power to achieve almost any goal, selfish or unselfish. The choice is your own, though the latter, of course, is the one that permits you to utilize your exceptional abilities to the most constructive purpose.

Your personal approach to questions is shrewd and analytical, perhaps too much so for your own good. Try to be a little more objective and dispassionate. You will then have a much broader understanding of the problems before you and be able to deal with them on a more comprehensive basis. When you are objective you are using one of your best personal assets, which is strictly logical intellect. You can think clearly.

Work and material progress in the world is dependent, much more than for other signs, upon your personality. Your appearance, charm, magnetism, speech, and actions are qualities of leading importance. Beware of this. Know how you appear to others so you can capitalize on yourself and on your external potentialities.

Where health is concerned, finding the proper regime of living for yourself should take first place. A self-contained, peaceful and happy home life is essential for the maintenance of your psychic forces. Also, you are particularly susceptible to medicines and drugs. Never take these to excess or allow yourself to become too dependent upon them.

The emotional temperament can be compared to a volcano, apparently quiet or extinct, yet filled below with boiling lava, which one day will break out to the

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surface. Your feelings are like this. You enjoy having a good time and people respond to your personal magnetism, yet you do not care too much for others until you meet the one, or the very few, who rouse the fiery warmth hidden beneath. In love, you are capable of a tremendous possessiveness, affection and self sacrifice; nothing or no one is allowed to stand in your way. The best marriage partner for Scorpio is one born in Taurus, April 20th to May 20th, or one born at any other time of the year with Taurean qualities dominant. Almost equally good are those born in Pisces, February 19th to March 20th, or in Cancer, June 22nd to July 22nd. You should be married to one with a strength of purpose and depth of affection equal to your own, yet one who, through the conflict of sympathetic opposition, will rouse your temperament to the full flower of personal expression.

You need an outlet for yourself which is apart from work and daily routine. Many Scorpios find this in music, especially the piano or the violin, in design and decoration, or in managing and supervising entertainments for others. It must be an interpretive and partly emotional field of action. Find your own, follow it to your best ability, and see how it enhances your personality and raises you to a higher pitch of life and living.

Yearly Forecast for Scorpio

The trend is on the upgrade for Scorpio. Many of the limitations, problems and difficulties of the past should soon begin to lessen in intensity, leaving you more free to utilize your inherent qualities and find a better outlet for them in the world of action.

The coming year is much more responsive, particularly in the field of the job and business interests. Be ready to take a more aggressive and progressive course, relying on ambition and enthusiasm. Leaders should be much more receptive to ideas, proposals and to your abilities as you present them. A new job may be sought, or a better place in your present organization. Emphasize this the winter until the spring of 1949, and again the later summer of 1949 on.

There is excellent judgment December, 1948 through 1949. If you speak, write, study, or use the logical mind in terms of action, be ready to expand your field.

The whole year favors travel, any chance to go afar, to move to another location, or to free yourself from binding limitations. A change of any kind should always open up a new vista of thought and ideas, and probably of material action as well. Pay special attention to this during the middle of February through March, May, and August into early September, 1949, though this latter period is a bit accidental and due care should be taken.

The coming year can be reasonably active socially, though it may be well not to depend on personal aid from friends. Old and established friendships will be more reliable than new acquaintances. Be discreet and restrained where the latter are concerned.

Special home plans can be developed and started in the early summer. This is an excellent time for planning or building a home, and also for making your home and family play a more important part in your social and business interests

In the broader sense, you are entering a much more constructive period than you have had in the past.

General Forecast for November, 1948

This is a month that is better for planning and laying the foundation for later progress than for doing too much at present.

This period is not to bad in itself, but many of the worst difficulties are likely

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to come through people. There is a repression dominant, which will make people much less responsive, more fearful and inclined to hold back. This is something which will have a definite effect on those contacting the public, sales people, teachers, entertainers, politicians, writers, owners of theatres, and businesses catering to luxury or pleasure.

In all businesses the best appeal will be on the basis of low price and long use. A very poor month for a spectacular advertising campaign, though a localized one for quick return may be tried the 8th to 12th.

This repression also limits the whole field of entertainment. Parties, engagements, social events, large or small, should be handled rather discreetly. Do not try to bring strangers together, or those known to be unfriendly. Fund raising parties are not advised, though the 8th to 14th and 20th to 25th contain limited prospects for gain.

Finances are fairly active the 1st to 15th. There is prospect of speculative gain or loss, with a little emphasis on the former for those who are on the alert. Immediate profits should be taken. Defer major buying at this time for personal use, business stocks of goods, or for permanent investment of assets.

A change in financial trend is due about the middle of the month. Speculation is apt to die down, with a change to a more practical and conservative attitude. This may not manifest itself immediately, though it should before very long, as activity sometimes takes a while to subside. Use the 16th until the end of the month for reconsidering investment plans. The new course may be put into effect about the end of the month or later. The coming period contains good indications for the buying and holding of property, land, farms and so on, though it would be well not to hurry about closing a deal. Only long term buying is advised, not for a quick turnover. Avoid all major financial activities the 13th to 17th and 26th to 30th.

Some political squabbles, a temporary business slowdown, and perhaps labor difficulties are apt to rise to a higher ratio towards the end of the month. Pay special attention to the general trend the 25th to 30th, a period likely to give a key to future conditions.

Give attention to the health of the young the 1st to 20th. See they do no work or play too hard, or be subjected to excessive strain of any kind.

Those holding working jobs should conserve the energies the 18th to the end of the month. This is a time when there can be business conflicts, bringing about worry, with adverse consequences to the digestive system and to the general health. Also limit important business conferences. Failure is in prospect.

Relax and take things easy in a personal sense the 10th to 14th, and 26th to 30th. Some disappointments and setbacks can come, so keep hopes and wishes at a relatively low level for the time being.

Your Forecast for November, 1948

ARIES

IF YOUR BIRTHDAY
Comes Between
MARCH 21 and
APRIL 19

The 1st to 17th of November is active, very changeable, and not entirely sound. Much travel appears in prospect, either a change of scene or perhaps a move to a new field of action or another job. Anything presenting itself that indicates an opening for you may be considered, but hesitate about entering into binding commitments for the time being. You may take hold, but keep on the alert as further change is likely to come.

If you can be successful the 8th to 12th, go ahead, but if there is any delay after this be much more wary the 13th to 17th. This latter period is bad for extensive travel, opening a new venture, for investment, business connections, and also bad for the ideas you may have in mind.

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Something is likely to be wrong somewhere, so make no commitments until you are absolutely assured of your safety, in money and other terms.

Travel is accidental the 1st to 27th. This is a bad time for high speed trips.

The 18th to the end of the month is excellent for business position. Concentrate on your ambitions, be ready to move ahead. Meet business leaders, grasp opportunity, show others what you can do, and that you can do it successfully. A good period for taking a new, long term job.

Be extra tactful with partner the 1st to 4th, and 10th to 14h, when a misunderstanding is possible. Do not allow yourself to take an upset too seriously.

Health trends are not of the best the 26th to 30th. Do not work too hard, or allow yourself to worry or fret over trifles. Take all precautions with the diet while away from home. Otherwise this might result in a fairly serious upset.

Also during this period be careful not to subject yourself to a quick, heavy strain. Guard against objects falling on you, and stay clear of animals that may be unfriendly.

The judgment is excellent in connection with savings and investment the 18th to the end of the month. Give special thought to possible advantages you can obtain in financial fields of action.

TAURUS

IF YOUR BIRTHDAY
Comes Between
APRIL 20 and
MAY 20

There is prospect of either major money gain, or loss, the 1st to 17th of November. If you have any active interests, in speculative fields, outstanding loans, business investment, be on the alert. You may take a quick profit, but be more cautious with long term commitments. Do not take an unnecessary risk, protect your interests in all ways. Note this in signing money documents, in legal affairs, and in making loans.

A poor time for allowing control of funds to get out of your own hands. Defer extensive buying. You could be extravagant and not get good value for the money you spend.

The 13th to 17th is dangerous, some loss is in prospect. Protect assets, guard against theft, carelessness, and damage to valuables. Do not trust those you do not know well, be sceptical. Opportunities for gain are likely to be unsound. Look closely for the weak element that is there somewhere if you can find it.

The 8th and 12th is good for special talks with associates, for writing important letters, settling difficulties with friends, and also for thinking up ideas. Put your mind to work.

A little upset with a friend is possible the 1st to 4th. Be tactful. Conditions with friends are worse the 10th to 14th, when there could be a more serious disturbance. Do not force any personal or emotional interest, it may be wise to have a quiet time and see fewer people. Avoid taking on any responsibility for a group, such as a big entertainment. You could end up with a problem on your hands, with everyone thinking you had done your work wrong no matter how hard you tried.

Supervise the young with extra care the 26th to 30th. Keep them clear of accidental dangers, in connection with travel, and also machinery, drugs and chemicals. Do not let them become overexcited, or there could be an adverse reaction.

Trips contain excellent prospects for pleasure and material progress the 18th to 25th. Be alert for anything coming from afar, and be ready to follow it up with enthusiasm. Bring it to a close by the 25th, however.

GEMINI

IF YOUR BIRTHDAY
Comes Between
MAY 21 and
JUNE 21

The 1st to 4th of November can be interesting socially, but do not set up any permanent hopes in regard to people met now. There is an element of uncertainty that can bring friends in, and take them out equally fast. Take a good time as it comes, and let it go at that.

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Give special attention to new and original ideas the 8th to 12th. Use these ideas for settling problems, holding talks with others, presenting suggestions, giving a talk, and for taking the lead in intellectual terms. This is the best time for analyzing a special opportunity, a projected change, or a future trip.

If you feel you have become settled in a rut, that life has fallen into too routine a pattern, make some sort of change the 13th to 17th. Do something you have not done before, break out into a new field, think up some new ideas, consider a change in appearance and the impression you make on others. What you do now is of less importance than the fact that you develop a new approach to life. Make a turn in the road so as to see things from a new angle. It will pay you to do so.

The general field of finances, income and investment becomes much more active and progressive the 18th on. During this latter part of the month pay special attention to new money ideas. Any action you may take should be on a long term basis, so you need do nothing in a hurry, but anything you do should be of extensive importance. Consider added job income, readjustment expenditures and outlays, new forms of savings and investment, and other general business and profitable interests. This is a time when you should get a good return for your efforts, even though the return may not come immediately. Do your planning in terms of months and years.

A home upset is in prospect the 26th to 30th. Be most tactful with the family, limit hard or special home jobs, defer asking guests or visitors, or ordering expensive work to be done on the home. Important family decisions are not advised, it being unlikely that you will be able to put them through.

CANCER

IF YOUR BIRTHDAY
Comes Between
JUNE 22 and
JULY 22

The 1st to 4th, and 10th to 14th of November are not good for inviting visitors to the home, or for giving a special party there. A very sudden upset could present itself and throw all your plans out of gear. You may be wise to keep your time and activities open, so you can accept anything that comes your way and enjoy yourself. The more you tie yourself down, the more you would be making yourself subject to a disturbance that might have far-reaching effects.

Family discussions on important current questions are not advised during these periods, more especially the latter one. You would find it hard to arrive at an agreement that would be mutually suitable.

Push ahead with a new business idea the 8th to 12th. Be original and progressive. There is an opening somewhere for you to move ahead and to make a good impression. Advertise yourself now, meet new people, make contacts with those who could aid you. This is an excellent time for taking the lead in a group project, a party or big entertainment.

Some rather unfriendly influences are connected with health all month. It is a time when you may be inclined to work too hard, to be too active, to take on more than you should. No matter how energetic you feel, follow a reasonable course of action. There is every prospect of being right. Move with energy and determination towards your goal. Emphasize family money plans.

The 26th to 30th is inclined to be dull, and a little disappointing. Take things as easy as you can.

LEO

IF YOUR BIRTHDAY
Comes Between
JULY 23 and
AUGUST 23

The 1st to 4th of November appear interesting, a time that could bring you some invitations or meetings with new friends. Yet this period also contains the prospect of a little personal upset. This is unlikely to be serious in itself, but, if is allowed to develop, could rise to a worse climax the 10th to 14th. Do not try to introduce different friends to each other, ask a special favor, write important letters to dear ones, or give a party.

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The 8th to 12th is excellent for making some special plans in regard to home and living conditions. You may consider a move to a new location, redecorating, buying special furniture or clothing, spending for repairs and maintainance, or readjusting the family life and interests so conditions would be more favorable. Put your mind to work to consider all family questions, and put the resulting ideas into effect.

An important month for children. Consider developing their potentialities, through special studies and training, and in other ways expanding their present and future prospects. The 1st to 15th is best for this, the last half of the month tends to be a bit accidental for them. Do not allow them to work too hard, or to become over-excited. Extensive travel is not advised for them. If you go away arrange a journey so there can be frequent rests.

Finances appear to be rather slow this month. It's a poor time for seeking added income, investing, speculating, making loans to others, or borrowing. If you take a money risk, the danger of loss is apt to rise towards the end of the month. The 26th to 30th is bad in money fields. Defer spending and do not accept a financial responsibility for a friend or for a social group.

Health trends appear to be on the upgrade.

VIRGO

IF YOUR BIRTHDAY
Comes Between
AUGUST 24 and
SEPTEMBER 22

An entertainment project the 1st to 4th of November might turn out to be much more expensive than you had anticipated. While you can have a good time, it sometimes is well to balance the cost against what you could have done with the money in other fields. Do not allow others to commit you to a major expense, at least until you have had time to think it over.

A business investment project can be carefully considered the 8th to 12th. An opportunity presented to you, or an idea of your own, should have progressive prospects. Your business and financial judgment is sound, so you may arrive at a practical decision.

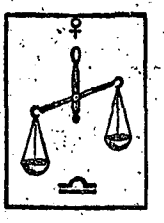
Where your personal funds are considered, the 10th to 14th is apt to be wasteful. Major spending may not be worthwhile. If you see some luxury goods you want think twice before getting them. Do not ask advice of friends about spending; they may tempt you to go beyond your means.

Social interests are very active all month. During the first half this centers in the home, which you can make more attractive not only for the family, but also for some special friends whom you may wish to please or impress. The 8th to 18th would be excellent for giving a home party for business associates or leaders.

The last half of the month is equally interesting, up to the 27th. This is a time when you may aim for some social leadership in practical fields, be ready to take charge of an organization, or a subsidiary element of it. If you have any ambitions or hopes in this respect, push ahead.

The 15th to the end of the month is a bit accidental at home, limit risks with machinery, fire and sharp instruments.

The 28th through the turn of the month is rather difficult, some problems are likely to present themselves to you. No matter what comes, do not try to act radically, the harder you try the worse the obstacles would be. A poor time for starting any new venture, large or small, in personal or business interests. Especially, limit commitments that would tie you down to a course of action in the future. They could turn out to be more burdensome than you had expected.



LIBRA

IF YOUR BIRTHDAY
Comes Between
SEPTEMBER 23 and
OCTOBER 23

Here is an active, interesting and perhaps exciting month from an all-round point of view. Since some conditions are not entirely progressive you will need to take care in action.

The mind is very keen and alert the 1st to 12th. Concentrate on ideas, original thoughts that will help you to break

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out of a rut, to make some changes among your affairs, to clarify your ambitions, and know what to do to put your hopes into effect. Do some serious thinking along entirely new lines of thought. An excellent period for giving a talk, getting some personal advertising, creating prestige, meeting new people in personal and business fields, and doing anything else that would help you to translate your own potentialities into reality. Draw on your enthusiasm and your ambitions if you want to get anywhere in the world of action.

Do not depend on friends, however, the 1st to 4th and 10th to 14th. Their advice may not be sound, no matter how fine their intentions. Rely on yourself at these times.

Go slow in business activity the 13th to 18th. Defer business investment, taking risks, holding important meetings or presenting ideas.

The 18th to the end of the month favors considering major home changes. You may purchase real estate, spend on the home for repairs and maintainance, buy furniture, decorate, and do anything else you have in mind. Make your plans on a long range basis. You need not hurry to put them into effect but when you do be sure they are sound.

The 26th to 30th is rather worrying. Whether or not anything happens, you are apt to feel gloomy and downcast. This may be because you have set up some impossible hope for yourself, and when it is not realized you naturally feel disappointed. Defer trips, and if you must go away be more careful of your health.

Avoid written legal commitments the 15th to 27th unless you have sound professional advice. This is a time when you should read, and remember, the words in fine print. Know what you are signing.

SCORPIO

IF YOUR BIRTHDAY Comes Between OCTOBER 24 and NOVEMBER 22

Finances are very active but completely unsound the 1st to 15th. This is a time when some speculative opportunities could come your way, a chance to make a big profit; on the other hand, the chance is equally strong that you could lose. What the outcome will be rests on how you handle matters. You would probably not be making a mistake to ignore any offers made, thus following the safest course. If you do accept, be wary about trusting others, see that your interests are well protected, sign papers with caution, and be ready to pull out at the first sign of trouble. Keep a watchful eye on everything connected with your affairs, with the general trend, what others are doing, and the progress being made. Stop everything by the 15th, since from then on danger of loss becomes intensified. You cannot be too careful.

The last half of the month is bad for financial activity. Defer major purchasing, loans to others, borrowing, legal activity, signing documents and making commitments. Also watch the pocketbook, lock doors and windows if you go away, and be extra careful with possessions while traveling. See that insurance is effective.

In non-financial fields there is excellent judgment. The 10th to the end of the month brings a stimulated intellect, enabling you to think up some very progressive ideas. If there is anything you really want, or want to do, now is the time to make your plans. You may come to a specific decision as to how and where to act, what you should say and do, and just how far you should go. This applies to your job, ambitions, social interests, friendly contacts with others, personal prestige, and any other move contributing to your advancement in life.

The 13th to 17th is poor for a business journey. The outcome is likely to be too complicated to permit you to gain in any way.

The 18th to 25th is excellent for a pleasure jaunt with a loving friend. Here could be a chance to arrive at a special understanding, to reach that plane of sympathy having future consequences of interest to you.

Limit social and personal activity the 26th to 30th. There can be a disappointment, friends being unable or unwilling to live up to your expectations. A bad time for asking a favor, or for granting one.

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Others may not be as grateful as you thought they would be.

SAGITTARIUS

IF YOUR BIRTHDAY Comes Between NOVEMBER 23 and DECEMBER 21

This is a good month for opening up a new vista of life for yourself.

The 1st to 15th of November is the best for direct action. There is a good supply of energy and enthusiasm, a force that you can utilize to get what you want. Put your mind to work, think what is your main ambition or desire. Make some definite plans, and put them into effect. Whether it is a better job, added prestige, social leadership, more friends, or greater freedom of life and action, now is the time to go after it. Break out of any limitations there may be, and be ready to make more of your inner potentialities.

An excellent time for meeting leaders, getting personal advertising, making new business contacts and new friends. Be responsive to those you meet, accept invitations.

The 16th to 26th is equally active, but you are now somewhat more liable to make a mistake. If you do, it would be through over-eagerness. Therefore, check your activities as you go along, pause for analysis, and be careful not to say or do too much. A little restraint would be advisable now.

Bring all interests to a close by the 26th, as from then to the end of the month there is danger of a setback. Be ready for some harder work, added responsibilities, the unwillingness of others to aid you, and the onset of a little disappointment. Start nothing new, sit tight and wait out the coming few days. Watch your health, do not work too hard or have too long hours, defer meetings with business leaders, and do not ask a favor.

Watch for some trouble with a dear friend the 10th to 14th. Be tactful with all, so that no one will have hurt feelings. You may go to a party, but do not give one unless it is small and select.

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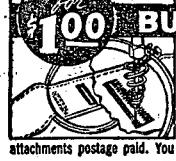

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CAPRICORN

IF YOUR BIRTHDAY Comes Between DECEMBER 22 and JANUARY 19

If you wish to make a better impression on other people, concentrate your efforts to the 6th to 12th of November. A friendly mental stimulus aids you to think more clearly, speak better, and so to make a more friendly state of conditions between you and associates or friends. Whatever your position in life may be, you are dealing with others on either a personal or a practical basis. How you appear to them is of importance in one way or another. Expand those contacts that can or might be of help to you in the future.

A special new friendship formed on the job the 10th to 14th may appear exceptionally interesting at first, but go rather slow in allowing your affections to become involved. The slower you form an association, the deeper will be mutual understanding.

Any uncertainty there has been in your general position and interests may be resolved this month. During the 1st to 10th make a general study of things, see where there are weaknesses and dangers, and if there is anything you can do to eliminate whatever troubles there may be. Make plans, but hold them in abeyance. Matters could rise to a climax of upset the middle of the month. If there is a major disturbance, let it work itself out, as this might be the final end of it all.

From about the 18th on conditions become much more stabilized. This is the time to establish yourself on a longer term basis, as this is the way matters are likely to be for some time to come. This is a very good period for starting a new and long term venture, making permanent connections with others, settling down and planning your future.

Avoid trips the 26th to 30th, a bad repression could bring you up against a disappointment. An important journey could be a failure, especially one made to put through a business deal. Expect little or nothing from incoming mail.

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ROMANCE IN YOUR STARS

AQUARIUS

IF YOUR BIRTHDAY Comes Between JANUARY 20 and FEBRUARY 18

There is extensive social interest and excitement the 1st to 15th of November. Here is an execllent chance to broaden the whole social sphere. Be ready to meet new people, singly and in groups, and to attend parties and meetings in order to enhance your opportunity for making contacts. Also, come forward in a personal sense, aim to assume some social leadership and to make a stronger impression on those who know you. This is a time when you could meet someone who would be most helpful in the future, strengthening an effectionate bond and aiding your material position in life.

About the middle of the month a friend might attempt to throw a heavy burden of work and responsibility on your shoulders. Try to keep yourself clear of this, or you may have a lot of hard work.

The last half of the month continues social activity, but conditions are less dependable. Too much excitement may lead to a clash and a break with one dear to you. Be much more tactful, and guard against laying yourself open to any kind of deceit or gossip.

Be wary of financial advice from friends the 16th to the end of the month. This could result in some money loss. Note this if you have a legal affair on hand, or if you are doing anything with savings and reserve assets.

Travel is favored the 1st to 25th. You can have a very enjoyable time while away. Accept an invitation to visit a dear friend.

Do important purchasing the 18th to 25th, this being a time when you should be able to get extra value, not only in price but in long and satisfactory use. This particularly applies to expensive clothing, furniture and equipment for the home.

During the last week be careful with machinery, chemicals, drugs and so on. You are subject to impulse, and this might

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PISCES

IF YOUR BIRTHDAY Comes Between FEBRUARY 19 and MARCH 20

Very progressive job conditions are present the first half of the month of November. Be alert for anything that indicates a change, either a offer to go to a new job, a voluntary move on your own account, a change of work and position in your present connection, making new contacts with business leaders, or trying out new ideas and methods. The trend is towards some sort of adjustment, and anything of this nature that presents itself, or that you can bring about, should have favorable consequences to you in prestige and income terms.

The last half of the month is equally active, but somewhat less reliable. Be more tactful with associates, guard against a difference of opinion leading to a clash of personalities, defer meetings with leaders and presenting ideas, though you may do the latter in writing.

Sit tight and do only routine work the 26th to the end of the month. A setback is in prospect, so the more you stay in the background the better chance you will have of avoiding it. Ask no business favors, defer legal activities, start new ventures of any kind, or otherwise lay yourself open to trouble.

There is excellent financial judgment the 1st to 12th. Turn your attention to income prospects, savings, readjusting the budget, increasing the reserve assets, and doing anything else that would help to improve your general financial position in life, with the present and the future in mind.

Children may be at source of added expense the 13th to 17th. Do not buy to excess for them.

Take important business trips the 1st to 12th, when there is the best chance of success. The remainder of the month is much less favorable in this respect.

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(Continued from page 29)

"No!" Augie cried.

The sheriff stood up wearily. "That's something else we can figure out later. Let's get out of here and let these people go to bed. I could do with some shut-eye myself."

At his orders, the troopers took Bronson out. He and Captain Mitchell followed within minutes. Mrs. Ord went out to the kitchen to make coffee.

"You don't want any, do you?" Gregg whispered to Andrea. She shook her head, and he lifted her to her feet. "Let's get out of here, you and I."

"That's an idea, son." Andrea's father came over, smiling, as he saw what they intended to do. "That little girl of mine needs rest—or something."

"I'll see that she gets it, whatever she wants," Gregg promised with his one-sided grin.

He half led, half carried Andrea from the room, followed by the eyes of its occupants. From the stairway, she turned back to smile and saw Jake, with his arm about Jessie, wave and wink. Jessie would get her Jake, thought Andrea, now that he was convinced that she, herself, was not for him.

The nightmare of terror and unhappiness was over, at least, for them. Andrea was not so sure what the future held for her.

Upstairs Gregg seated her in a soft chair before the fire and pulled up a hassock to sit at her feet.

"Darling, darling," he said. "How can I ever thank you?"

"I don't want you to thank me," she told him. Her heart cried, "I want you to call me darling and mean it! I want you to love me!"

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East. Andrea's fingers, which had been curling around his, relaxed.

"Terribly tired, darling?" He looked at her, anxious. "Want to go to sleep? Want a drink?"

She said, "No," to both suggestions.

"I'm a brute," he said abruptly. "You've been hurt and you're tired. I should take myself off, and I will. But, first, I want terribly to kiss you."

"Why don't you?" she asked.

In a flash, he was on his feet, gathering her up. And her mouth no longer ached, and her body was melting. He kissed her again and again. He kissed her until it seemed to Andrea that she might die if he did not stop and surely die if he did. It took all her will power to make her lips move beneath his to pronounce a single name.

"Lucille—"

"Lucille?" Gregg took his mouth a fraction of an inch away to look at her, puzzled. "What about her?"

"Aren't you going to marry her?" Andrea asked, taking a needed breath. "Your step-father said—"

"What Frank said," Gregg told her firmly, "and what I intend, or intended to do, are two different matters. I ran around with Lucille a little. She was fun, but my intentions were never serious."

"Then why did you let me think they were?" Andrea was becoming increasingly, hopefully uncertain.

Gregg frowned, trying to recall the occasion. Then he laughed tenderly. "I must be better at deception than I imagined. Darling, couldn't you tell that I loved you. But I was in a jam which I might not have gotten out of. I couldn't ask anything of you, or promise you anything."

"And now?"

She tipped up her face with her lips ready to give him all and everything that he might ask, and as he took them, his kiss promised her a lifetime of love.

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(Continued from page 83)

than she had ever laughed in her life, because for the first time she was laughing as a free person. Always there had been the jail of her wealth and the fear of not being beautiful.

Both were gone now. She couldn't worry about beauty, when beauty dissolved so sharply into skull and bones. And she couldn't worry about wealth, when all a man cared about was a girl who looked down at a baby lamb with the eyes of the Madonna.

It seemed to Leith that in that moment she grew up, and accepted a burden she had always been fighting against. Wealth was a burden. People envied her even when they flattered her, and when, in addition to wealth, she gathered the golden blossom of love, girls who had less could not forgive her luck. And there were always cheap people like Hugh, or hateful people, like Elaine. But there was the other kind, too—the wise, the rare, the fine ones, like Clark.

She cried brazenly, "Clark, this time I'm proposing to you! Let's get married right away, tonight. I'll never be unsure again. I'll never worry again. When Elaine is malicious, or Joan is catty, I'll look at them and see a bag of bones."

"When you look into my eyes, you'll see what was there all the time, if you hadn't been blinded by insecurity. Your own loveliness," Clark said crossly. "The woman he loves is always loveliest to a man." He shook her hard. "That's for almost breaking my heart." He kissed her still harder. "That is for being sensible and putting it together again." He pushed her toward the door.

"Hurry up," he said. "Because this time I'm not going to be engaged to a rich girl. I'm going to marry her."

"I'll be ten times as rich then," Leith said humbly. "In fact, I'll be really rich for the first time in my life."

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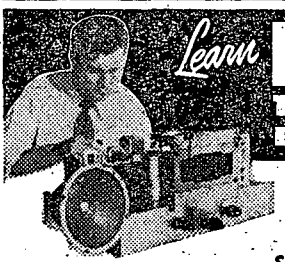

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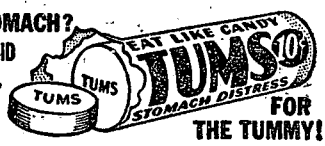

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(Continued from page 8)

7541 COLLECTS TOKENS

I am nineteen, five feet four and my hobby is collecting picture postcards and bus or subway tokens from different cities. Like all sports and love dancing. I have a dog and a kitten. Am a secretary by day and sure have some lonely evenings. Would like some mail.

Bobbie.

7542 HE SKETCHES

How about some pen pals writing me? Am six foot four inches tall, have brown hair and eyes and am twenty-three years old. My hobbies are sketching portraits and wood working. Baseball is my favorite sport and the Yankees are my team. Don't drink or smoke.

Big Ed

7543 WOW!

Socially ambitious, success in my heart, talent in my hands and classical music my inspiration. Am a writer of short stories, an artist and design my own clothes. Love nature, horses, dogs, sailing, horseback riding. Dark blonde, five feet five, gray-green-eyes describes a gay seventeen year old girl. Won't you write to me?

Lauretta

7544 BUSY MAN

I am a young man, writer by night and cashier by day. Have light brown hair, gray-green eyes and pleasing personality. Earnestly hope to hear from someone between twenty-five and thirty—who values friendship as one of most important things in her life.

Paul

7545 ALONE

Would someone like to write to a young widow? I have been very lonely since I lost my husband in the war. Am five feet one, have shoulder length blonde hair, blue eyes and a sunny smile. Enjoy boating, swimming, reading, cooking and like to walk in the rain.

Ollie

7546 WORKS DAY AND NIGHT

I am a young man of twenty-two, and run a restaurant and bar of my own which leaves no time to go out. Would like to hear from girls all over the States. Like movies, dances and fun in general. How about it, girls? Will answer promptly.

Dockie

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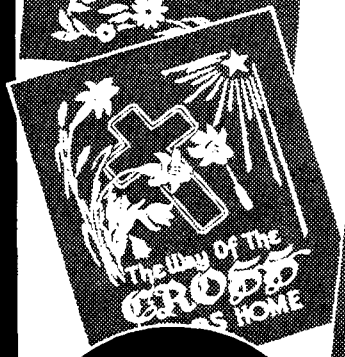

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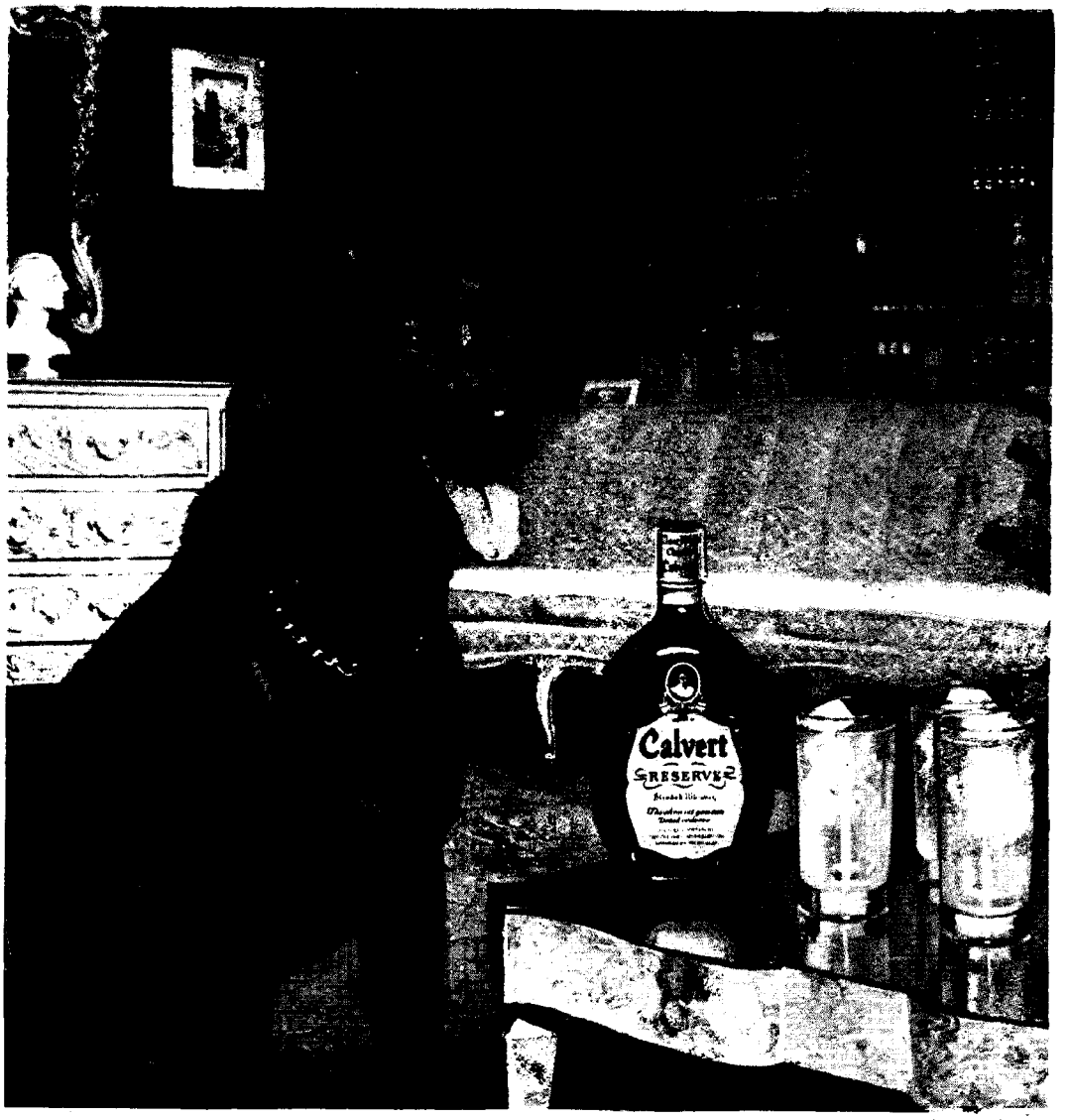

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